CANADA'S SCHOOLS:

REPORT CARD FOR THE 1990s

A CEA opinion poll

Tom R. Williams and Holly Millinoff

Canada's Schools: Report Card for the 1990s

A CEA opinion poll

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Canadian Education Association
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FOREWORD

Following up on previous surveys done in 1979 and again in 1984, the Canadian Education Association (CEA) commissioned a poll of Canadian opinion on education, carried out by Decima Research in May 1990, to explore the public perceptions of our schools as we begin the important task of preparing our students to face the challenges of the 21st century. It is hoped that such a poll will tell us where we are, and indicate areas to be examined more thoroughly.

The Board of Directors of CEA was pleased that Dr. Tom Williams agreed to serve as both chairman of the Opinion Poll Committee and as author of the final report. Dr. Williams is currently Vice-principal (Operations and University Relations) at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Prior to this appointment, he served as Dean of Education at Queen's, following a period as Chairman of the Department of Educational Administration at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Dr. Williams has been very much involved in CEA activities over the years, serving as Chairman of the Advisory Committee on the Short Course in Educational Leadership, as a member of the Board of Directors, and as President of the Association in 1987-88. In addition, he has been a regular contributor to *Education Canada*, among other publications.

Canada's Schools: Report Card for the 1990s raises the most important questions facing educators today. The responses and in-depth analyses provided by Dr. Williams and his research assistant Holly Millinoff will enable us to prepare for the next century with a solid grasp of where we stand today. This report should prove both interesting and useful to everyone working in the field of Canadian education today.

Robert E. Blair
Executive Director
Canadian Education Association

CANADA'S SCHOOLS: HIGHLIGHTS

General

Are the schools better, worse or the same as five years ago?
- 29% felt schools had improved
- 42% of respondents had not seen much change
- 20% thought schools had worsened, down from 37% in 1984.

What grade (A, B, C, D, or F) would you assign to your school?
- 80% gave A, B, or C. (B, 39.2%; C, 34.5%; D, 7.1%; A, 6.2%; F, 3.8%).
- Larger communities were more likely to say F (13.4%)
- Native speakers of English were more than twice as likely to give their schools an A.
- The Atlantic region and Quebec, which have the greatest proportion of French-speaking people, were most likely to give F
- The Prairies gave the most A's; half of British Columbians said C or lower.
- The quality of teaching was cited as the reason for giving both good and bad marks.

What is the Biggest Problem Facing Schools Today?
1. Drug and alcohol abuse: 17%
2. Lack of discipline: 11%
3. Lack of preparation for the workforce: 9%
4. Improving basic skills: 9%.

- Francophones were most concerned with quality of teaching and the development of programs for students with special needs.
- Urban areas were twice as likely to cite lack of discipline.
- Racism was more of a problem in Quebec, the Prairies and Ontario.
- Discipline was cited more frequently in Ontario, Quebec and B.C.

Government Commitment to High Quality Education
- Two-thirds felt that the government is somewhat or strongly committed.
- Older people were more likely to say strongly committed.
- Half the francophones felt the government was not at all or not too committed.

Value for Government Spending on Education
- Canadians are split 50-50 on the value government receives for spending.
- University graduates are most likely to say they get excellent value.
- B.C. and Ontario feel they get poor value.
- Quebeckers have the most confidence: 17% said excellent value for money spent.

Effectiveness of Teaching Staff
- 58.5% gave A or B for effectiveness of the teaching staff; only 3.2% said F.

Responsiveness of Schools to Parents' Concerns
- 58% said A or B. Ages 35-44, likely with children in school, gave the most A's and B's.

Preparation of Students for the Workforce
- 21% gave the schools D or F; an improvement from 29% in 1984.

Preparation of Girls in Science, Mathematics and Technology
- 75% said C or better; 45% said A or B; the oldest and youngest gave highest grades.

Preparation for Post-secondary Education
- 81% gave A, B, or C. Professionals and executives assigned fewer A's.

Student Intellectual Development

Learning Skills and Knowledge in Science, Mathematics and Technology
- 68% were satisfied.
- Highest satisfaction in the 18-24-year-olds and over 65s.
- People with the lowest educational level were the most satisfied.
- Professionals and executives were significantly more dissatisfied than other groups.

Ensuring that Students Learn to Read, Write and Speak Properly
- One-third were dissatisfied.

Ensuring that Students Learn Problem-solving Skills
- More than twice as many respondents expressed satisfaction than dissatisfaction.

Ensuring that Students Develop a Respect and Love of Lifelong Learning
- One-third were dissatisfied.

Human and Social Development

Tolerate, Respect and Co-operate with Others
- 50% were at least somewhat satisfied with the ability of their schools here.
- Two-thirds of anglophones but only half the francophones were satisfied.

Develop a Sense of Self-worth and Confidence
- Just under two-thirds answered positively.

Show Personal Initiative and Self-discipline
- One-half felt that schools did a satisfactory job.

Accept People of Different Cultures and Races
- Generally, respondents were satisfied; only 20% were dissatisfied.
- Native Canadians and people of Asian and Middle-Eastern origin were most dissatisfied.

Learn to Deal with Social Issues such as Sex and Drug and Alcohol Abuse
- Two-thirds registered satisfaction, with older respondents more likely to be dissatisfied.
- People with higher incomes were more likely to register satisfaction.
- People with the least education and people in large cities were more likely to be dissatisfied.

Summary of Selected Demographic Variables

Children in Elementary School
- People with children in elementary school were more likely to give high grades.
- Parents of secondary students did not respond differently from the general public.

Region
- Atlantic Canada and the Prairies were very positive, awarding A or B more frequently, on:
  - effectiveness of teachers
  - responsiveness to parental concerns
  - teaching children to read and write, and problem-solve
  - teaching children to tolerate others, develop self-worth, personal initiative and self-discipline.
- Quebeckers gave more F's.
- Ontario and Quebec were most dissatisfied with learning to read, write and speak properly.
- Quebeckers were not satisfied that children were learning problem-solving skills and tolerance, respect and co-operation with others.

- Ontarians expressed higher levels of dissatisfaction on more variables than any other province.
- British Columbia was most critical on effectiveness of teachers, preparation of girls in science, mathematics and technology, and preparation of students for the workplace.

Language

- Francophones assigned lower grades on most questions, but were more positive than average on preparation of girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology, and on the value the province receives for money spent on education.

Community Size

- Dissatisfaction with performance of schools in areas over one million was alarming. They were more negative on most questions.

Age

- It has been suggested that older citizens are more critical of schools than the norm. In fact, in this survey, they respond closely to the average, citing only two areas of dissatisfaction with schools: teaching students to read, write and speak properly, and ensuring that they learn to deal with social issues such as sex, drugs and alcohol.

Summing Up

Most people gave the schools in their community a B (39%) or C (35%), suggesting a relatively high degree of satisfaction with schools. Some 29% of the population indicated that schools have improved over the past four years, 20% indicated they have become worse, and 42% said they have stayed the same. To put it another way, almost three out of every 4 respondents felt that in the past five years the schools have stayed the same or improved.

Two out of three see their provincial government as somewhat or strongly committed to maintaining a high quality educational system and one-half felt that the government received good or excellent value for its education dollar.

Perceptions of the biggest problems schools face included drug and alcohol abuse (17%), discipline (11%), preparation for the workplace (9%) and improving basic skills (9%). The most positive assessments (grade A and B combined) were accorded to the effectiveness of the teaching staff and the responsiveness of the staff to parents' concerns about their children. However, respondents indicated high degrees of dissatisfaction with performance in reading, writing and speaking (22% somewhat dissatisfied, 11% very dissatisfied).

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the findings of a national opinion poll, conducted by Decima Research on behalf of the Canadian Education Association (CEA), to explore attitudes and perceptions relating to issues in elementary and secondary education in Canada. It is the third such national survey of the Canadian public's attitudes towards education that has been conducted by the CEA: previous ones were undertaken in 1979 and 1984.

Although the overall structure of the survey has changed over time, some questions have remained essentially the same in each of the three survey years. These include 1) What letter grade would you assign to the publicly funded school in your community? (Respondents were asked to rate their schools using the grades students are often given, that is A, B, C, D or F (or fail), to indicate the quality of their work.) 2) Do you feel that publicly funded schools in your community have improved, deteriorated or stayed the same? 3) What do you think is the biggest problem that schools in your community should deal with? For these questions, historical comparisons are drawn in the analyses to determine if public attitudes have changed over time and, if so, to what degree.

There were 22 questions in this year's survey, which was conducted between May 2 and May 7, 1990. The questions covered a broad range of topics beginning with general inquiries into the overall quality of publicly funded schools and the level of funding, and ending with more specific examinations of the quality of the teaching and the social and intellectual preparation of today's students. Three of the questions, on the social and intellectual development of students, that appeared in the 1990 survey also appeared in 1984: 1) What letter grade (i.e., A, B, C, D or F) would you use to describe the effectiveness of the teaching staff? 2) What letter grade would you use to describe the preparation of students for the workforce? 3) What letter grade would you use to describe the preparation of students for post-secondary education? The content of all 22 of the questions was determined through the input and co-operation of the CEA opinion poll committee, an experienced group of Canadian education professionals, consisting of:

Dr. Tom Williams (Chair)
Vice-Principal (Operations and University Relations)
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

Mr. John Cholvat
Education Consultant
Toronto, Ontario

Dr. Ray G. Fast
Director of Education
Saskatoon Board of Education

Dr. Naomi Hersom, President of CEA
President, Mount Saint Vincent University
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dr. Stirling McDowell
Secretary General
Canadian Teachers' Federation
Ottawa, Ontario

Monsieur Jacques Mongeau
Président
Conseil scolaire de l'île de Montréal
Montréal (Québec)

Monsieur Fernand Paradis
Directeur général
Fédération des commissions scolaires catholiques du Québec
Québec (Québec)

Mr. Tom Rich
Chief Director of Programs and Services
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University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dr. Rod A. Wickstrom
Superintendent of Schools
School District No. 37
Delta, British Columbia

Mr. Earle W.H. Wood
Deputy Minister
Department of Education
Fredericton, New Brunswick

Although there was some discussion in the introduction to both the 1979 and 1984 surveys about the legitimacy of opinion polls, it was nevertheless concluded that polls are a useful tool with which to measure public opinion as long as the results are interpreted with the requisite amount of caution.

The analyses in this report were based on the aggregate (or total) responses to each of the 22 questions. Verbatim responses were drawn upon where they were elicited in the survey process, i.e., respondents were asked "what do you think is...?" and asked to supply their own answer. In addition, cross-tabulations were calculated for each of the questions and the twelve demographic characteristics listed here:

- age
- sex
- ethnicity
- income
- region inhabited
- education
- native language
- marital status
- employed for pay
- children in elementary school
- children in secondary school
- own or rent home

Several are not referred to specifically in this report because no statistically significant relationship was found. For those that were statistically significant, a discussion of the results is provided. For the purposes of this survey, a confidence level of 95% has been chosen indicating that there is at least a 95% probability that the association didn't occur simply as a matter of chance. This level is one that is typically used in reporting opinion poll results in the media today.

The structure of this report will follow, with some exceptions, the order in which questions were asked in the survey. (A list of the questions is found in Appendix A.) It begins with overall assessments of public school quality (Are schools better/the same/worse than they were five years ago? What letter

grade would you assign your community school? What would you say is the biggest problem facing schools today?) and the government's role in education. Specific issues examined include the effectiveness of the teaching staff, the responsiveness of schools to parents and the success of schools in preparing students in selected areas together with the performance of schools in the intellectual development of students. The report ends with a summary of selected demographic factors and brief concluding comments.

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Sample

The sample in this survey consisted of 1200 telephone interviews based on a proportional sample randomly drawn from the Canadian population 18 years of age and over. Males and females were selected in the same proportion as the general population. Statistically speaking, a sample of this size is considered accurate to within 2.9 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

Although the sampling procedure was designed to produce an approximation of the civilian population of Canada, it should be noted that the sample is only representative of Canadians who have direct dial telephone service. Therefore, Canadians accessible only by a single telephone number serving a large number of people, such as residents of senior citizens' homes, hospitals and Indian Reserves and people with radio-telephone service or no telephone service at all were automatically excluded from the sample. Furthermore, the sampling procedure broke down Canada into 11 regions (10 provinces and Metro Toronto); thus residents of Labrador, the Yukon Territory and the Northwest Territories were not included in the survey.

Of the sample taken, the demographic characteristics, the numbers involved in each category and the proportion of the total sample represented by that number are set out in Appendix B.

It should be pointed out that a category for French respondents is included in the ethnic breakdown. This should not be confused with the other demographic category - mother tongue- where respondents identified themselves as anglophone or francophone. A person who identified their ethnic background as French may in fact not speak French at all but may be descended from French parents or grandparents or have a French family name.

The most sophisticated procedures have been used to collect and analyze the information presented in this report, but it must be remembered that surveys are not predictions. They are designed to measure public opinion within identifiable statistical limits of accuracy at specific points in time. This survey is in no way a prediction of opinion or behaviour at any future point in time.

Reporting of Data

The survey itself consisted of 22 questions and was conducted by telephone interviewers employed by Decima between May 2 and May 7, 1990. The answers to these questions were reported to the CEA in table form. Aggregate tables showed the frequency and percentage of answers given by all respondents. The mean, the median, and the standard error were also provided to the writers of this report.

Cross-tabulations, designed to compare responses to two or more questions, were also provided. Although the aggregate tables revealed what the total group felt about a particular question, the cross-tabulations provide specific reactions of particular demographic groups. For each cross-tabulation, a chi-square statistic was provided. This is a test of statistical significance that helps to determine whether there is a systematic relationship between the two variables that have been cross-tabulated. With a test of statistical significance we learn the probability that the observed relationship could have happened by chance. For the purposes of the analyses used in this report, a 95% confidence level was chosen. This indicates that there is at least a 95% probability that the association observed

between questions in the cross-tabulations did not occur simply as a matter of chance. In other words, we can be confident 95% of the time that the same result would show in successive surveys made about the same time, using the same sampling procedure, the same interviewers and the same questions.

For each cross-tabulation, measures of the individual significance of the sub-categories within each demographic grouping were also provided. In order to make this report more readable to the general public, individual statistics are not reported. The authors, in reporting specific data, have in nearly all cases only reported relationships that were significant at a 95% confidence level or above.

It should be pointed out to readers, however, that the confidence rating is based on the entire sample size of 1200. When comparisons are made on the basis of region, income, language, age categories, etc., the findings may be subject to a greater amount of error, with less confidence due to the smaller samples being compared.

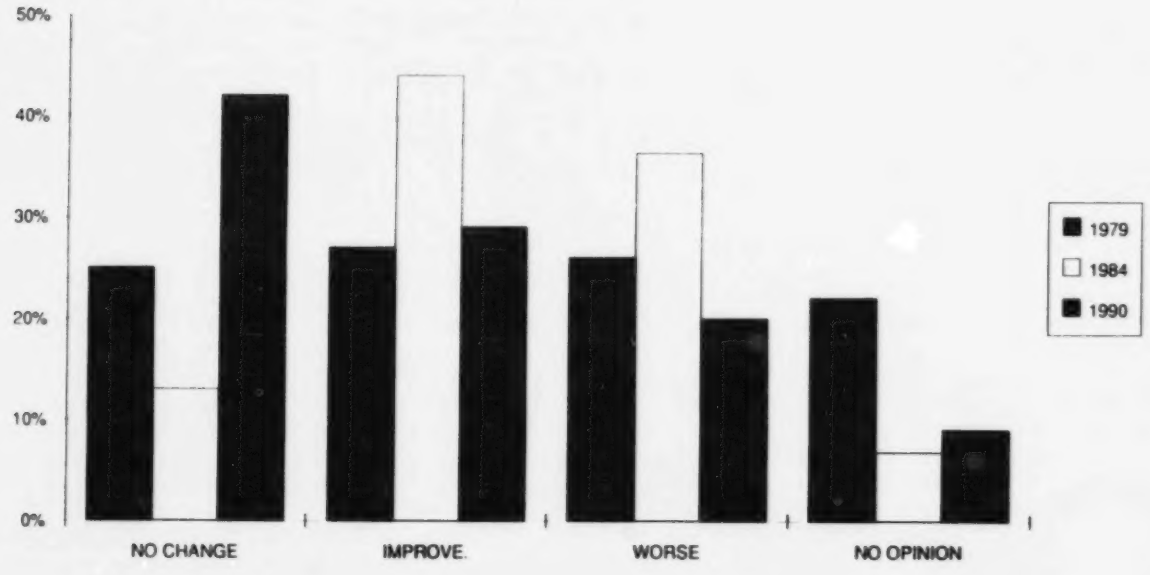
GENERAL ASSESSMENTS

Change in Quality of Schools Over Time

The first question in the survey asked if the schools were better, worse or the same as they were five years ago. 42% of the respondents said they had not seen much change in the quality of their schools over the past five years. A little under one-third (29%) felt schools had improved while 20% thought they had become worse. Between 1984 and 1990, there was a sharp decline in the number of people polled who felt that the quality of their schools had improved. (See Figure 1.)

Nearly 44% of respondents in 1984 felt that schools had improved: just under 30% felt that way in 1990. However, there was a similar decline in the number of people who thought that their schools had worsened, from 36.6% in 1984 to 20% in 1990. The numbers appear to indicate a decline in the

Figure 1
Change in Quality of Schools



polarization of attitudes towards education over time. Along with this decline in the number of people who feel strongly, either positively or negatively, towards their school system, there has been an increase in the number of people who think that their schools have not really changed at all. It should be noted that the question asked in the current survey was modified slightly from that which appeared on the 1979 and 1984 surveys. (The previous question was "In general, how would you compare schools of today to schools of your day?" In 1990, the question was: "Are schools better, worse or the same as they were five years ago?") So historical comparisons should be interpreted with the requisite amount of caution.

The cross-tabulations revealed some fairly strong relationships between certain demographic variables and the response to this question. Respondents with children in elementary school were more likely to say that schools have improved (34.4%) than people with no children in elementary school (27%). Similarly, respondents with children in secondary school were more likely to say that schools have improved (37.2%) than people with no children in secondary school (27.6%). The numbers suggest that people who have current, direct contact with the school system are more likely to have a higher opinion of its quality than people whose perceptions have been formed through some other means - the media, perhaps.

Although the overall relationship between the level of education and the perception of schools now vis-à-vis five years ago was not significant, there was a significant relationship between people who are still in school (i.e., anyone over the age of 18 who is a student at any institution, whether a secondary school, cégep, community college, university, etc.) and their perception of publicly funded schools now versus five years ago. People still in school were among those least likely to say that schools had become worse and were most likely to say that schools had improved.

The survey also revealed some specific relationships between city size and perception of school quality that were statistically significant at the 95% level or above. Respondents from large urban centres with populations of one million or more were most likely to say that schools had become worse, while people from small towns and rural communities with populations of less than 10,000 were most likely to say that the quality of their schools had improved.

Grades Assigned to the Performance of Community Schools

In 1990, the most prevalent grade assigned by respondents to their community school was B (39.2 %), followed by C (34.5%), D(7.1%) , A (6.2%) and finally F (3.8%). (See Figure 2.) As in the previous question, cross-tabulations with demographic characteristics yielded an inverse relationship between community size and perception of school quality. Respondents from larger communities were more likely to give their schools failing grades (13.4%) than inhabitants of very small or rural communities (10.3%). There was a wide divergence in grades given to schools by anglophone and francophone Canadians. Native speakers of English were more than twice as likely to give their schools an A. As can be seen in Figure 3, respondents from the Atlantic region (14.3%) and Quebec (13%), which have the greatest proportion of French-speaking people, were most likely to give their schools failing marks. Respondents from the Prairie provinces were most likely to give their schools an A, while residents of British Columbia were least likely. In fact, nearly half of all British Columbians polled (48.2%) gave their schools a grade of C or lower. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents from the Prairie provinces (57%) gave their schools a grade of B or above.

Nearly one-third of all respondents who gave their school an A did so because of the quality of the teaching. Verbatim answers indicated that it was generally felt that the quality of teaching was very high and that the teachers were concerned, helpful and dedicated to teaching young people. Furthermore, 20% of the respondents who gave their community school an A did so because they felt that the schools did a good job preparing the students for the real world of post-secondary education and employment.

Among respondents who gave their community school a B, the feeling that schools are, in general, good was the most frequent reason given for choosing that grade. People felt that the schools, although not great, were doing the best job with the resources available to them. A good overall perception of the quality of the teaching was the second most frequent reason given for the grade of B.

At the other end of the spectrum, 17.4% of the respondents who awarded schools a C and nearly one-quarter of those who awarded a D or Failing grade did so on a perception of poor quality teaching.

Figure 2
Grades Assigned to Schools

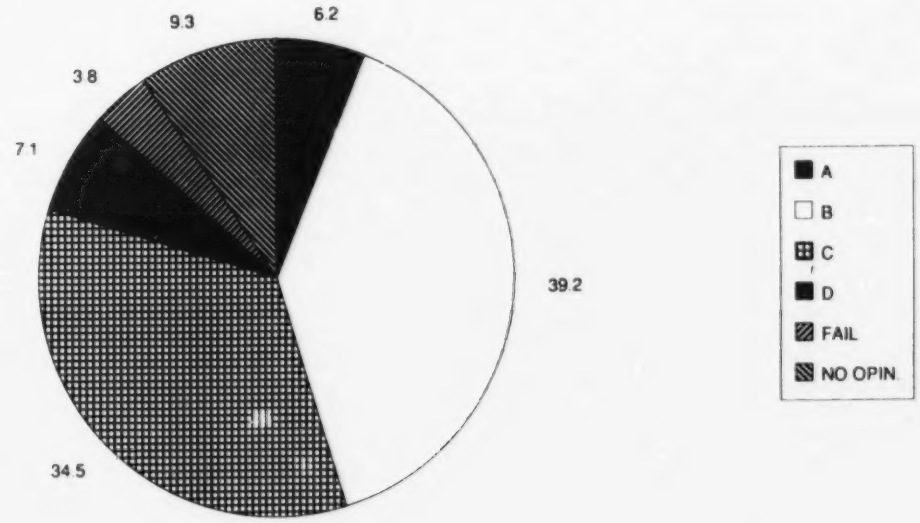


Figure 3
Grades Assigned to Community Schools - Regional Breakdown

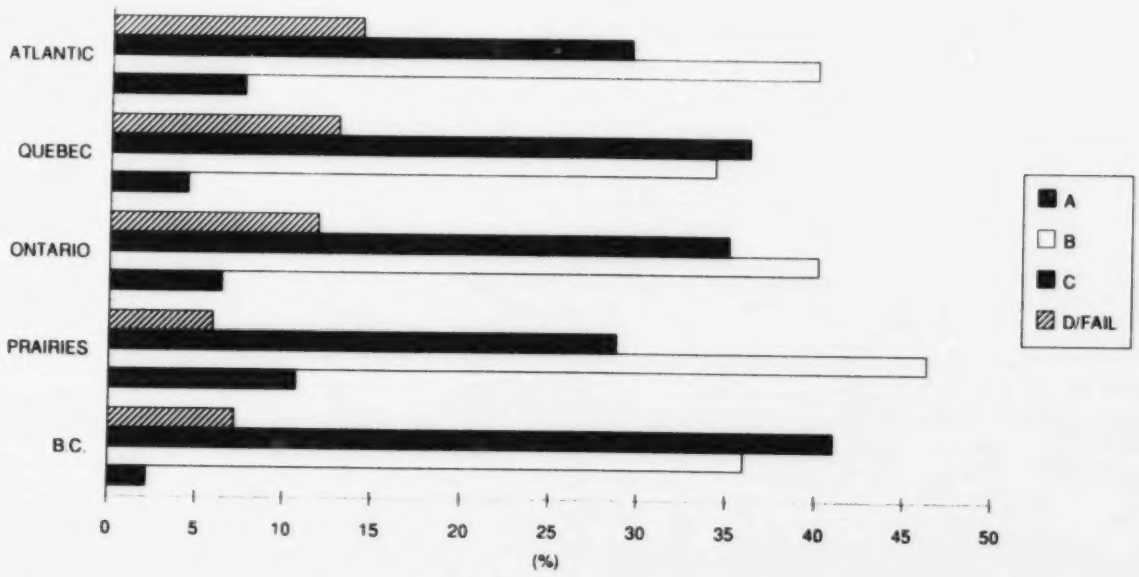


Figure 4
Grades Assigned to Community Schools - Historical Comparison

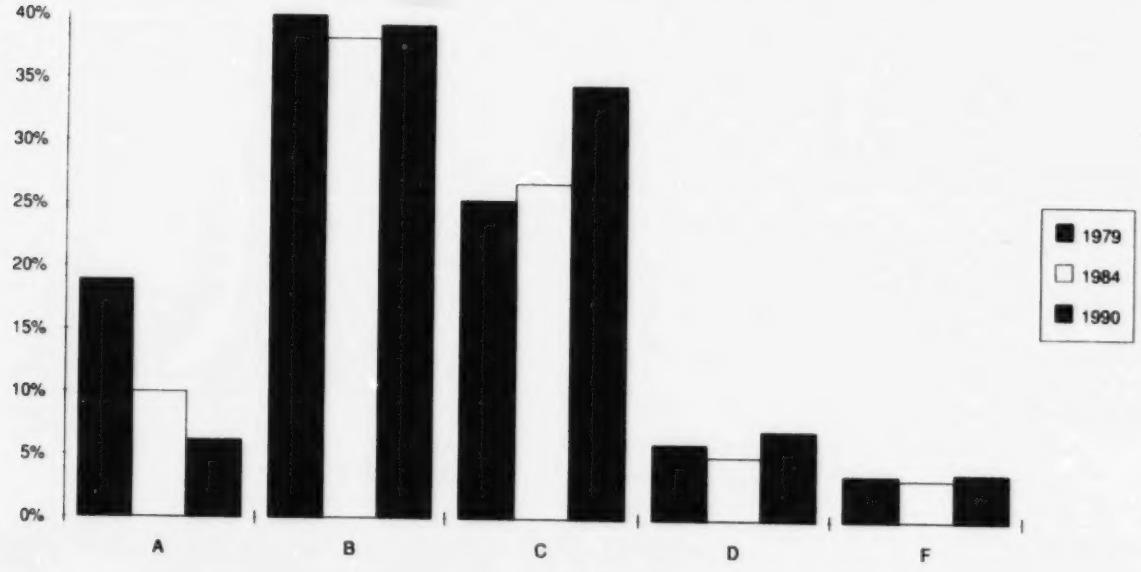
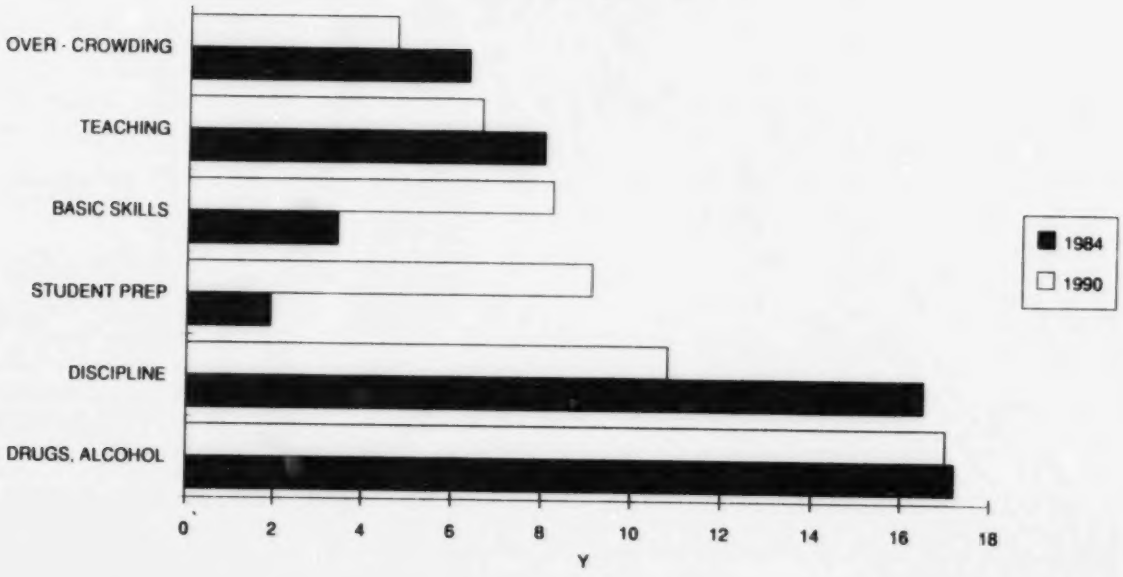


Figure 5
Biggest Problems Facing Schools



It is interesting to note that the quality of teaching was mentioned as the reason for giving both good and bad marks. The most negative respondents felt that teachers had little interest in teaching children to learn but were only doing the job for the money. A lack of discipline in the schools and insufficient preparation for the real world were also cited as reasons for giving schools grades at the low end of the scale.

The general feeling that the quality of schools has worsened over time is reflected in Figure 4. Since 1979, the number of respondents giving their community schools a grade of A has declined from 18.9% to 6.2%, but the number assigning a C has increased from 25.3% to 34.5%. On the other hand, there has not been much change in the number of people giving grades of either B, D, or F.

Biggest Problems Facing Schools Today

Drug and alcohol abuse continues to be the biggest problem facing schools today, according to 17% of respondents. (See Figure 5.) An almost identical number in the previous CEA survey (1984) cited drug and alcohol abuse as the biggest problem in schools. But concerns expressed in 1984 and 1990 diverged somewhat beyond that. A lack of discipline was the second most frequent response in 1984 and 1990, but the numbers reveal that concern about the lack of discipline has diminished somewhat over the six years since the last survey. In 1984, some 16.5% of respondents felt the lack of discipline to be the biggest problem facing schools. By 1990, that number had dropped to just over 11%.

Still on the question of the biggest problem facing schools today, the lack of preparation for the workforce was the third most frequent response in 1990, replacing pupils' lack of interest, which was the third most frequent answer in 1984.

In the 1990 poll, cross-tabulations with demographic characteristics revealed, ironically enough, that respondents in the youngest age cohort (18-24) are most concerned with the problem of drug and alcohol abuse. The feeling that the lack of discipline is the biggest problem facing schools today was far down on the lists of the youngest people polled, but increased in frequency as the age of the respondents increased. Although the greatest number of respondents in the 65 plus age category mentioned drug and alcohol abuse, an almost equal number (18%) thought that the lack of discipline was the most serious problem. Only 7% of respondents in the 18-24-year-old category thought that discipline was a problem. Respondents with the most education (i.e., a university degree) were most likely to cite the lack of student preparation for new technology as the biggest problem facing schools today, but those with lower levels of education tended to cite drug and alcohol abuse.

Drug and alcohol abuse topped the list of problems facing schools for all but the highest income earners. Respondents in the highest income category ($75,000+) thought that the provision of basic skills was the biggest problem (20.8%) followed by the lack of student preparation for the future (18.2%). Just one income level below, there was marked contrast in the concerns expressed: nearly 27% felt that drug and alcohol abuse is the biggest problem; only 8.9% mentioned concern with the provision of basic skills. Similarly, middle income earners tended to think that drug and alcohol abuse is the biggest problem, followed by the education of special needs children. The problem posed by drug and alcohol abuse also held sway as the number one problem facing schools among people polled in the lowest income categories. The second most likely response in this group, however, was either the lack of discipline or the lack of preparation of students for the future.

Between anglophones and francophones, a striking difference was observed in the perception of problems facing schools today. Although nearly one-quarter of all native speakers of English polled felt that drug and alcohol abuse is the biggest problem facing schools today, less than 10% of French-speaking Canadians concurred. They were most concerned with the quality of teaching and the development of programs for students with special needs. The lack of student discipline was the second most frequent concern of native speakers of French while the lack of student preparation ranked second among anglophone Canadians polled.

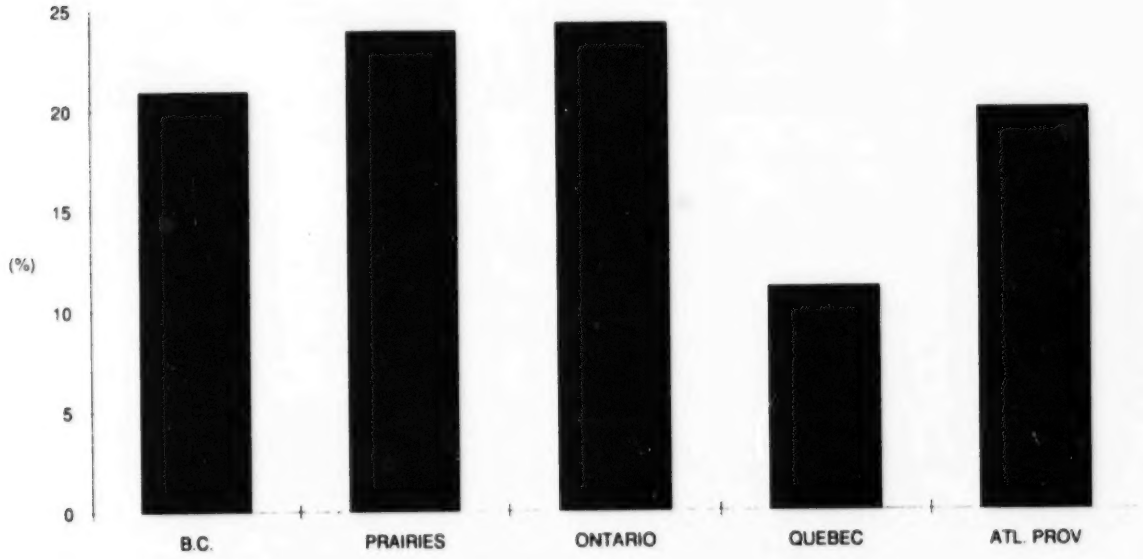
Respondents from every ethnic group except French Canadians thought that drug and alcohol abuse is the biggest problem facing schools today: more than 20% of each ethnic group ranked this as the number one problem. French Canadians, on the other hand, thought that teaching students with special needs is the most pressing problem (14.1%) followed by drug and alcohol abuse (13%). Among respondents from all other ethnic groups, there was much less concern with the education of special needs groups. For respondents of Northern European descent, for example, it ranked at

the bottom of their list of school problems. Although both males and females felt that drug and alcohol abuse is the biggest problem that schools today should deal with, they diverged somewhat on their second choices. Males felt that student preparation was the second most pressing problem, but females thought that schools should address the lack of discipline and respect.

Respondents from all communities, regardless of size, were unanimous in their belief that drug and alcohol abuse, and the need for sex education, are the biggest problems facing schools today. However, respondents from urban areas were nearly twice as likely to say that the lack of discipline was a problem than their counterparts from small towns and rural areas.

At the regional level, the responses reflected earlier breakdowns on ethnic and language groups. Quebec was the only region not to rank drug and alcohol as the number one problem facing schools. (See Figure 6.) The most frequently mentioned problem among Quebeckers was the education of students with special needs. (See Figure 7.) Although the remainder of the country was in unison on drug and alcohol abuse, the recognition of other problems varied widely from region to region. For instance, racism was seen to be more of a problem in Quebec, the Prairies and Ontario than in British Columbia and Atlantic Canada. (See Figure 8.) Discipline was expressed as a problem more frequently in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. (See Figure 9.)

Figure 6
Biggest Problems for Schools - Drugs/Alcohol



RELATED QUESTIONS

Government Commitment to High Quality Education

Two-thirds of the respondents felt that the government is somewhat (56.1%) or strongly (10.1%) committed to high quality education, while the remaining third felt that the government is at best not too committed. In fact, nearly 8% of all respondents felt that the government is not at all committed.

Breaking down the responses by age revealed that older age categories (45-54, 55-64 and 65+) were more likely to say that the government is strongly committed to higher quality education than their younger counterparts. Those who felt most strongly that the government is not at all committed to high quality education came from the 35-44 age group. Homeowners were more likely to say that the government is committed to high quality education than were those who rent.

Figure 7
Biggest Problems for Schools - Teaching Students with Special Needs

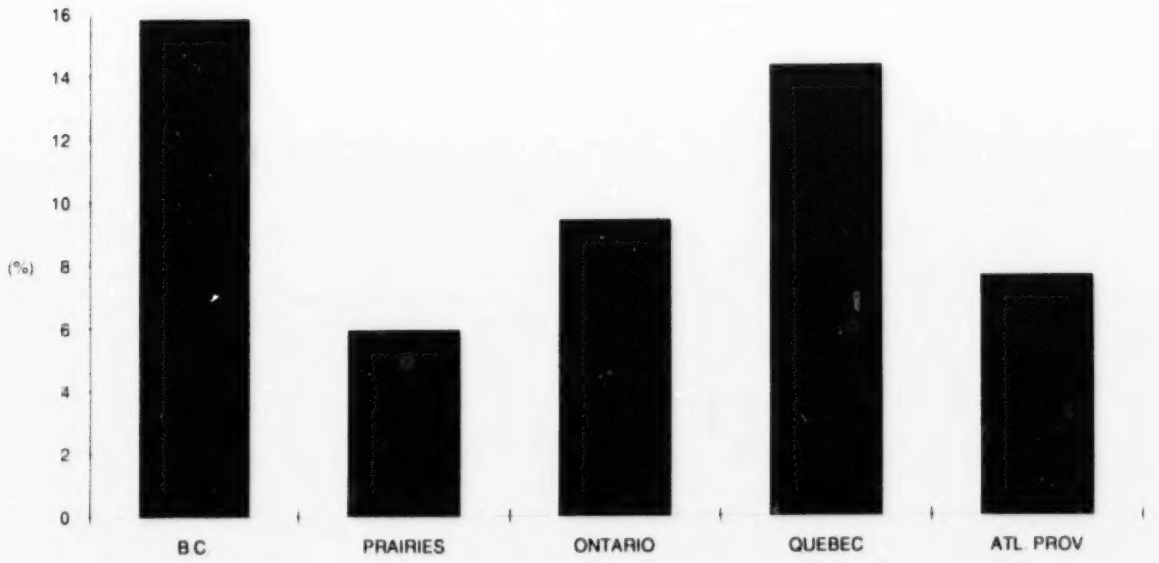


Figure 8
Biggest Problems for Schools - Racism

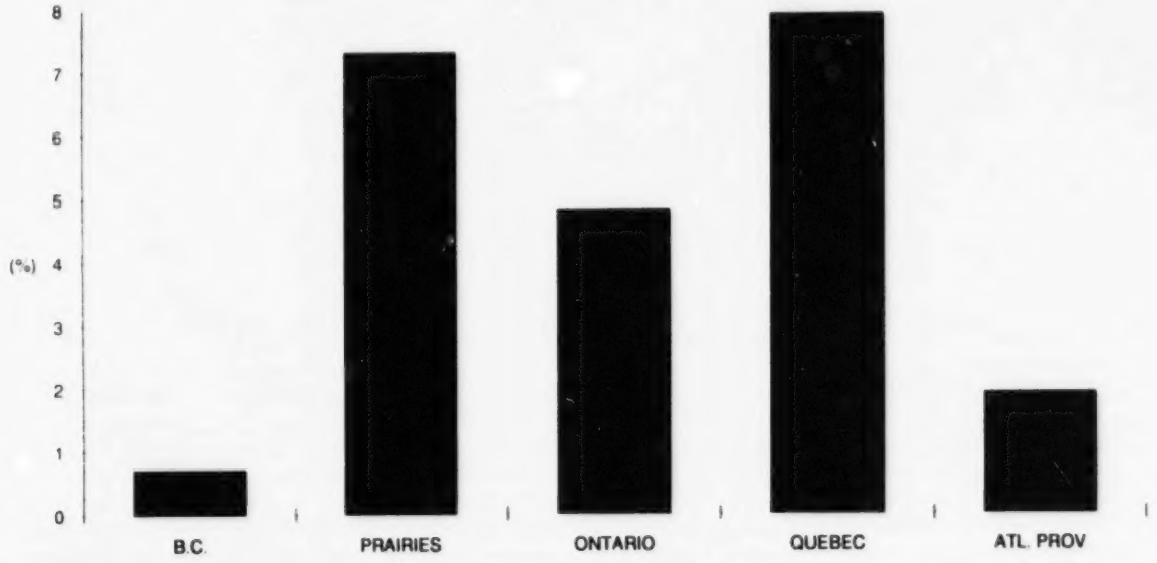


Figure 9
Biggest Problems for Schools - Discipline

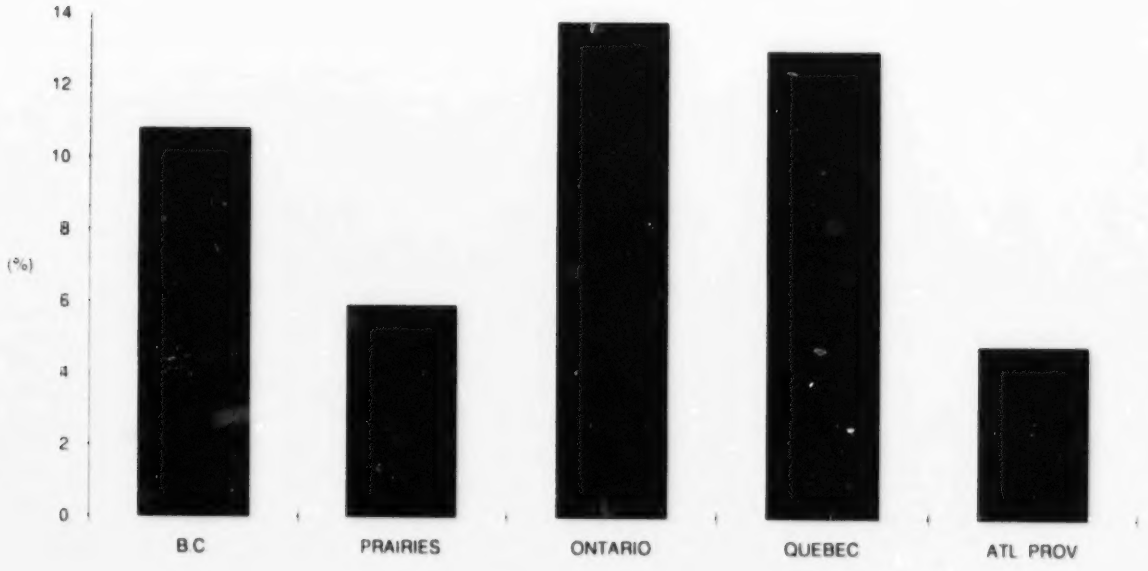
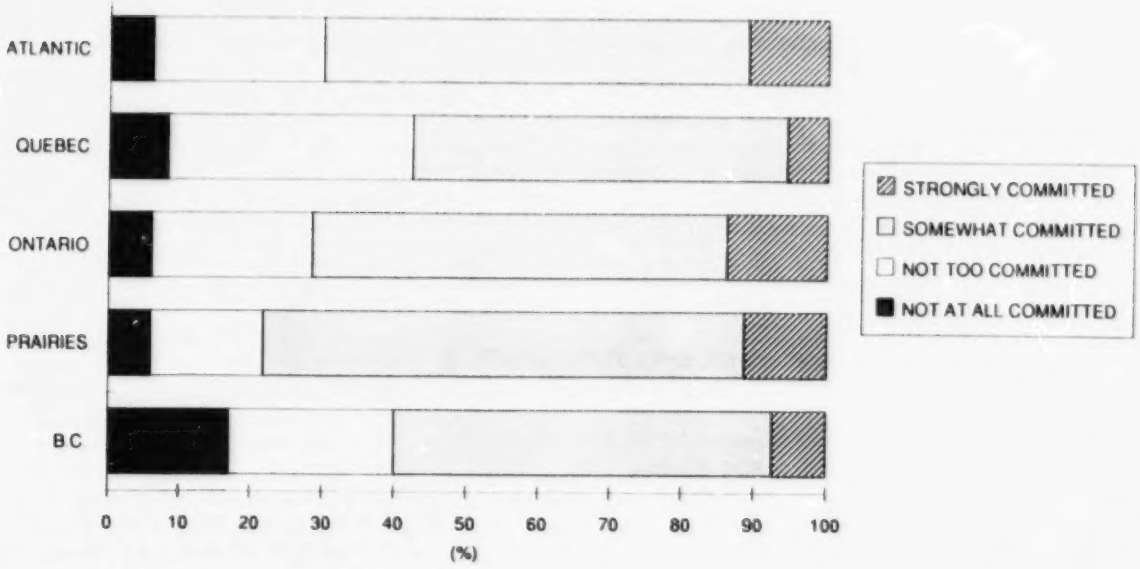


Figure 10
Government Committment to High Quality Education



According to the survey, males have more confidence in the government's commitment than females. Nearly 12% of all males felt that the government is strongly committed to high quality education compared to just 8.7% of the females.

English-speaking Canadians were almost twice as likely as French-speakers to say that the government is strongly committed to education. In fact, more than two-thirds of the English-speaking respondents felt that the government is at least somewhat committed to high quality education while nearly half of the francophones polled felt that the government was not too committed (35.2%) or not at all committed (8.8%). Regionally, Quebeckers were least likely to say that the government is committed to education (42.4%); British Columbians were close behind (40%). Respondents from the Prairies, Ontario and Atlantic Canada, on the other hand, were most likely to be positive about the government's commitment. In fact, close to 80% of all respondents from the Prairie region said they felt that the government is somewhat committed (66.8%) or strongly committed (11.4%) to education. Some 17% of respondents in British Columbia showed the least faith in government support of the school system, saying the government is not at all committed to education. (See Figure 10.)

Although the overall relationship between community size and commitment to education was not statistically significant, there were some stronger relationships revealed when specific sizes of community were examined. Respondents from large metropolitan areas were more likely to say that the government is "not at all" committed to high quality education while residents of smaller towns and rural areas were least likely to feel that the government is "not at all" committed to high quality education.

Value for Government Spending on Education

Canadians, as a whole, are split on the value they believe the government receives for its spending on education. Roughly 50% felt that the government gets only fair or poor value while the remaining 50% felt otherwise. (See Figure 11.)

University graduates are by far the most likely to say that government gets excellent value for the money it spends on education, and they are the least likely to say that the government gets poor value.

Respondents from British Columbia (26.8%) and Ontario (20.2%) feel that the government gets poor value for the money it spends on education. (See Figure 12.) Quebeckers, on the other hand, are least likely to say the government gets poor value for its money. In fact, they have the most confidence of any region: nearly 17% of respondents from Quebec said the government gets excellent value for its money. This represents the highest figure from any region and is nearly twice as high as the next most confident areas — the Atlantic region and the Prairies. Approximately 9% of the people polled in each of these regions said their government gets excellent value for the money it spends on education.

When the ethnic composition of respondents was reviewed, it was found that Canadians who identified themselves as French felt that the government gets a "good" return on the money it spends on education. In fact, fully two-thirds of respondents of French origin felt that the government gets at least a fair value; 16% said the government gets "excellent value". Respondents of Eastern European descent have the least amount of faith in this respect: fully two-thirds said that the government gets only fair (50%) or poor (15%) value for the money it spends on education.

ASSESSMENT OF SPECIFIC AREAS

General

Respondents to the 1990 CEA Opinion Poll were asked to assign a grade to several key questions on the performance of schools in their particular communities. Specifically, they were asked to grade schools as A, B, C, D, or Failed on a) the effectiveness of the teaching staff; b) the responsiveness of the staff to parents' concerns about their children's education; c) preparing students for positions in

Figure 11
Value for Government Spending on Education

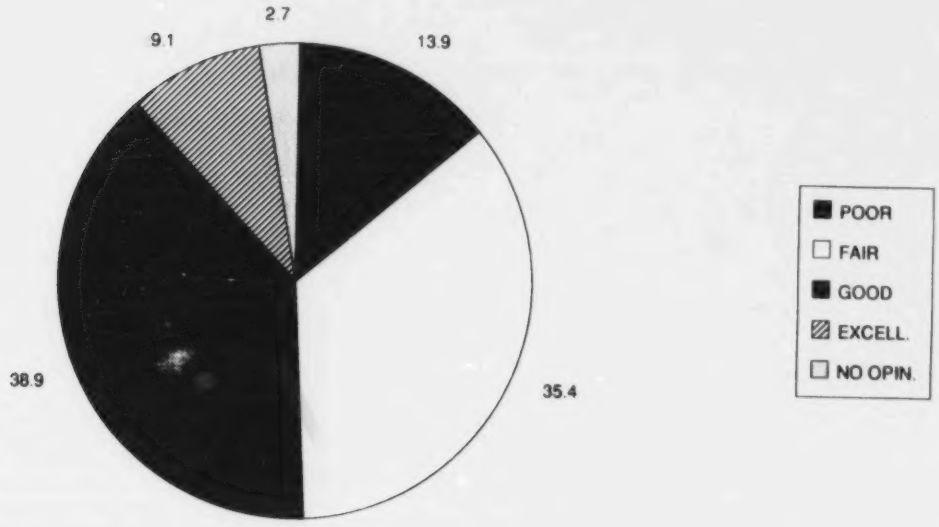
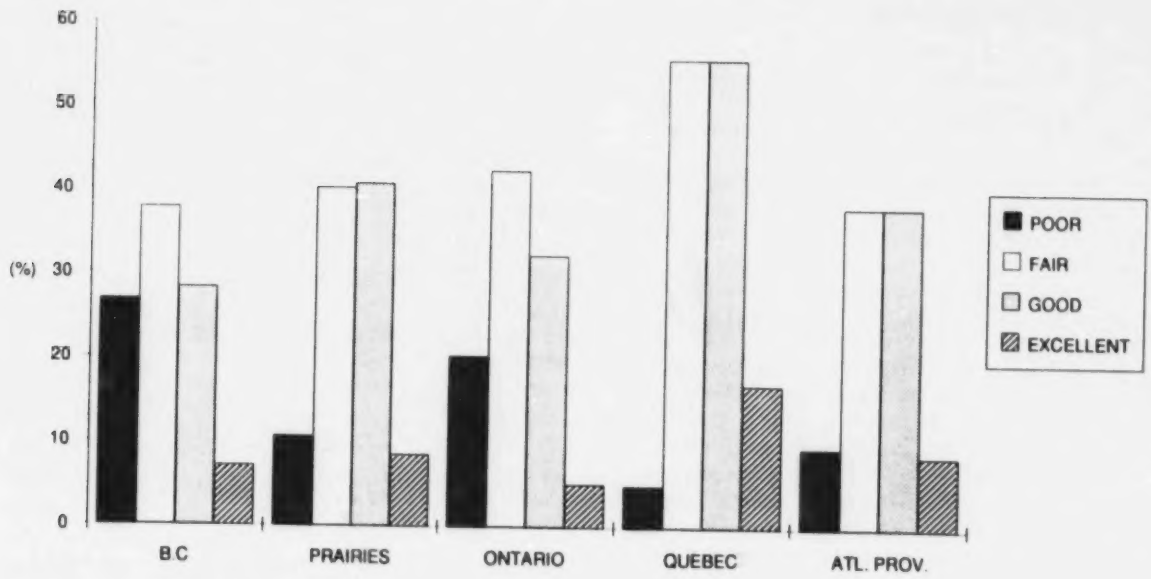


Figure 12
Value for Government Spending on Education - Regional Breakdown



the workforce; d) encouraging the education of girls for careers based in science, mathematics and technology, and e) preparing students for post-secondary studies.

Table 1
Aggregate Results: Selected Variables

	A	B	C	D	Fail	No Opinion
	(Percentages)					
Effectiveness of teaching staff	14.2	44.3	26.1	5.2	3.2	7.1
Responsiveness to parents' concerns	18.9	38.8	25.4	6.6	3.2	7.1
Preparation for the workforce	7.5	28.8	35.9	13.1	7.8	7.0
Preparation of girls for sci/math/tech	10.1	34.8	30.3	8.7	6.1	10.1
Preparation of students for post-secondary	12.0	40.8	29.0	7.7	3.8	6.7

Over 70% of all respondents felt that the nation's schools were performing at or above a C on the specific factors outlined in Table 1 above.

The strongest negative views were found on the success of schools in preparing students for the workforce. Three-quarters of the respondents said that schools rank at a C or above on preparing girls for careers in science, math or technology; 15% indicated that they performed at a D level or failed.

Of particular interest is the relatively high percentage of people who had no opinion on this matter. Given the large amount of attention paid to this matter by some corporate leaders and the media in recent years, it might suggest that members of the public are not receiving or understanding the message communicated to them from these sources. Hence, a slightly different public educational campaign might be in order.

On a positive note, 72.2% of respondents gave the schools a C or higher for their preparation of students for the work force. Here, however, there was substantial polarization as some respondents also expressed a high degree of dissatisfaction as evidenced by a D or Failing grade (20.9%).

Effectiveness of the Teaching Staff

As indicated earlier, 58.5% of respondents suggested that schools should be assigned an A or a B for the effectiveness of the teaching staff; only 3.2% gave a failure. Responses appear to be strongly related to the occupation of the respondents, the region and the size of the community in which they live.

Teachers and people working in the service or cultural sector or in technical areas tend to assign far more A's or B's to the performance of schools on this variable than others. Professionals, executives or owners of businesses, together with production and agricultural workers, are more likely to grade the schools D or failures. (See Figure 13.)

When one looks at the impact of the region in which the respondent lives on answers to the question of teacher effectiveness, two things stand out: a) the highest degree of satisfaction, as evidenced by the assignment of A's and B's, is found in the Atlantic Region and b) significantly fewer A's and B's are given to schools in British Columbia, where a much higher percentage of C grades are assigned. The largest numbers of D's or Failures are found in British Columbia and Ontario. Interestingly, in British Columbia, a very high percentage (12.2%) of people polled expressed no opinion on this matter, suggesting to the writers that more public information on the effectiveness of the teaching staff in British Columbia schools might be in order.

Finally, residents of communities of one million people or more assigned lower grades overall to the teaching staff, whereas respondents in communities of ten thousand or fewer or in rural communities assigned the highest number of A's or B's to schools on this variable.

When comparisons are made of the answers to this question in 1990 and in 1984, some

Figure 13
Effectiveness of Teaching Staff - Regional Breakdown

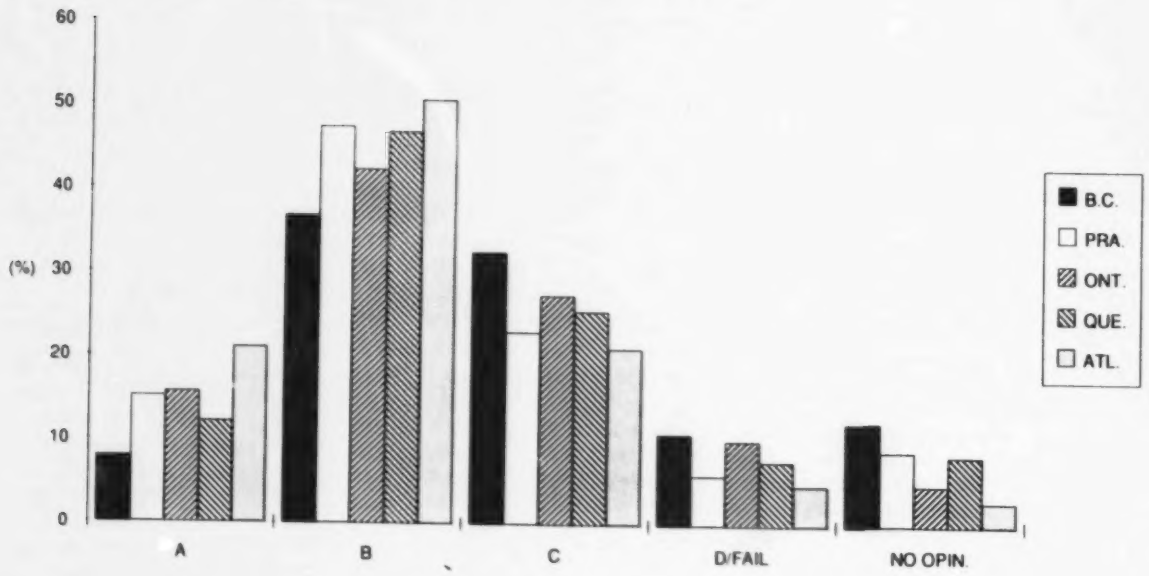
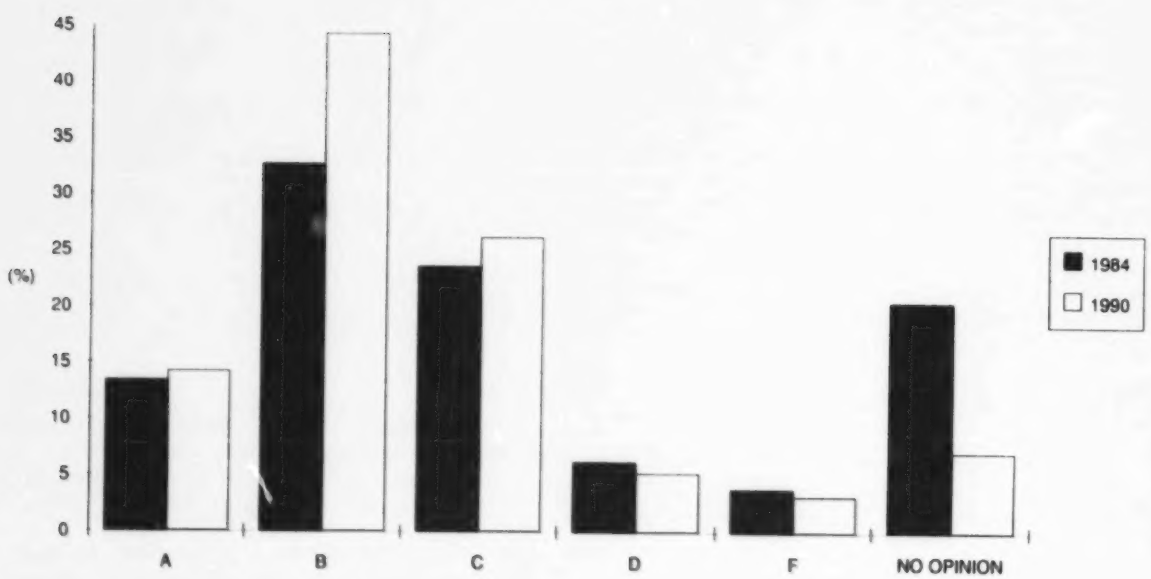


Figure 14
Effectiveness of the Teaching Staff



interesting observations are possible. Overall, the percentage of A grades awarded remained relatively constant but the number of B grades increased by over 11%. In general, the percentage of respondents satisfied with the effectiveness of the teaching staff (as evidenced by the total of A and B grades) increased while the number expressing no opinion dropped appreciably. (See Figure 14.) The percentage of B grades rose in all regions (see Figure 15), and the percentage of A grades rose slightly in all regions except the Atlantic where there was a drop of approximately 7%. (See Figure 16.)

Responsiveness of the Schools to Parents' Concerns

In general, the Canadians polled were very positive about the responsiveness of schools to parents' concerns; almost 58% awarded the schools an A or B. (See Figure 17.)

Statistically significant relationships between responses to this question and the following demographic variables were found: 1) age, 2) whether they owned or rented their home, 3) ethnicity, 4) native language, 5) the region in which they lived and 6) community size.

The 18-24-year-old age group assigned the lowest number of A or B grades to this question (48.7%) but they assigned more C's than most other age cohorts. The highest number of A's and B's were assigned by the 35-44 age category (67%.) This category would be more likely to have children in school than either the youngest or oldest age groupings. As expected, respondents with children in elementary schools assigned a significantly higher number of A or B grades to schools for their responsiveness to parents' concerns (70.7%) than those with no children in elementary school. (53.3%.) Respondents with no children in elementary school were more likely to assign C. There was no significant difference in the responses of people who have children in secondary schools and those who haven't. This may reflect the fact that, traditionally, elementary schools are neighbourhood schools and have considerably more parental contact than secondary schools. To the writers, it also begs the question as to whether or not secondary schools should pay more attention to this perception, particularly if their objective is to increase support for publicly funded schools. If the perceptions of your client groups (here, the parents of secondary school students) are not significantly different from those of the public at large, it could suggest that a potentially powerful support group is being overlooked or is not concerned about this aspect of the schools' performance.

Homeowners were far more likely to assign A grades to the school than those who rent, the latter tending to give C more frequently.

A striking difference was found when the answers about the responsiveness of schools to parents' concerns were examined in relationship to the official language spoken by the respondent. Those who indicated that their language is English gave a much higher proportion of A's to schools (21.4%), than those whose native language is French (11%.) Francophones are far more likely to assign a grade of D or Fail to the schools on this question (13.1%.) Responses to this question strongly suggest to the authors that schools need to address ways in which they can improve their responsiveness to this group of Canadians.

Looking at the region in which the respondents lived, we find significant differences in the perceptions of responsiveness of schools to parents' concerns. Those who live in the Prairies (67.6%) were most likely to assign grades of A or B, followed by respondents in the Atlantic provinces (60.9%), whereas Quebeckers assigned the fewest A grades of any region.

Again, the size of the community appears to have a significant impact. Residents of cities of one million or more assigned the fewest number of A's and the highest number of D's or Failures to schools for their responsiveness to parents' concerns.

Preparation of Students for the Workforce

It is in response to this question that the people polled were the least charitable: almost 21% gave the schools a D or failing grade. Yet this represents an improvement over the 1984 study when almost 29% gave grades in this range. Also noted is a sizeable growth in the number of B's and C's awarded. (See Figure 18.)

The percentage of A grades awarded on the preparation of students for the workforce increased in the Prairies, Ontario, and Quebec, remained constant in British Columbia and decreased slightly in the Atlantic Region. (See Figure 19.) But even in the Atlantic provinces, a higher total percentage

Figure 15
Effectiveness of the Teaching Staff - Number of B's Assigned

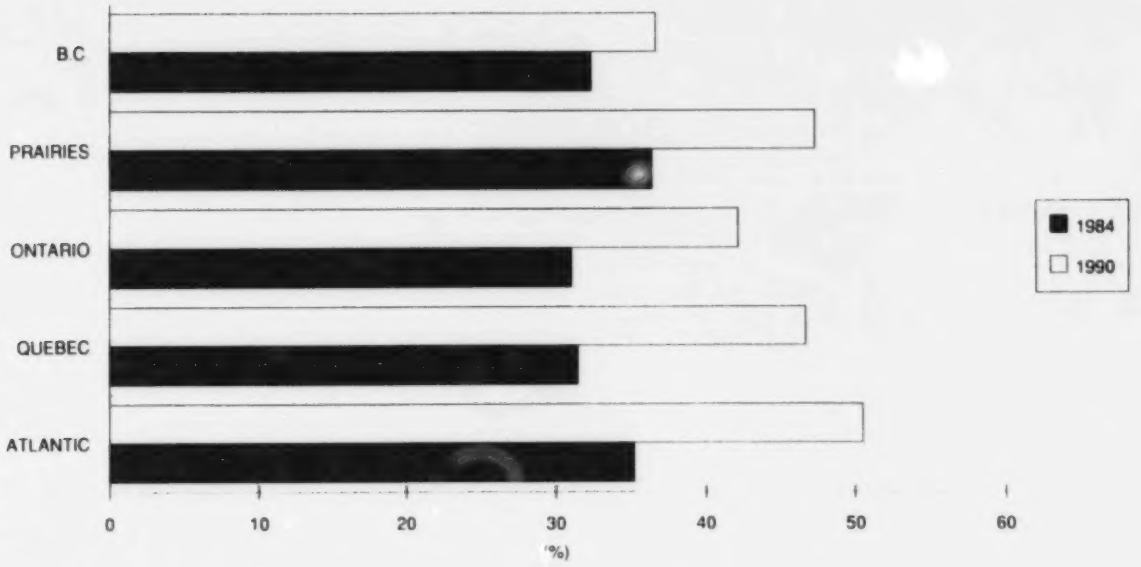


Figure 16
Effectiveness of the Teaching Staff - Number of A's Assigned

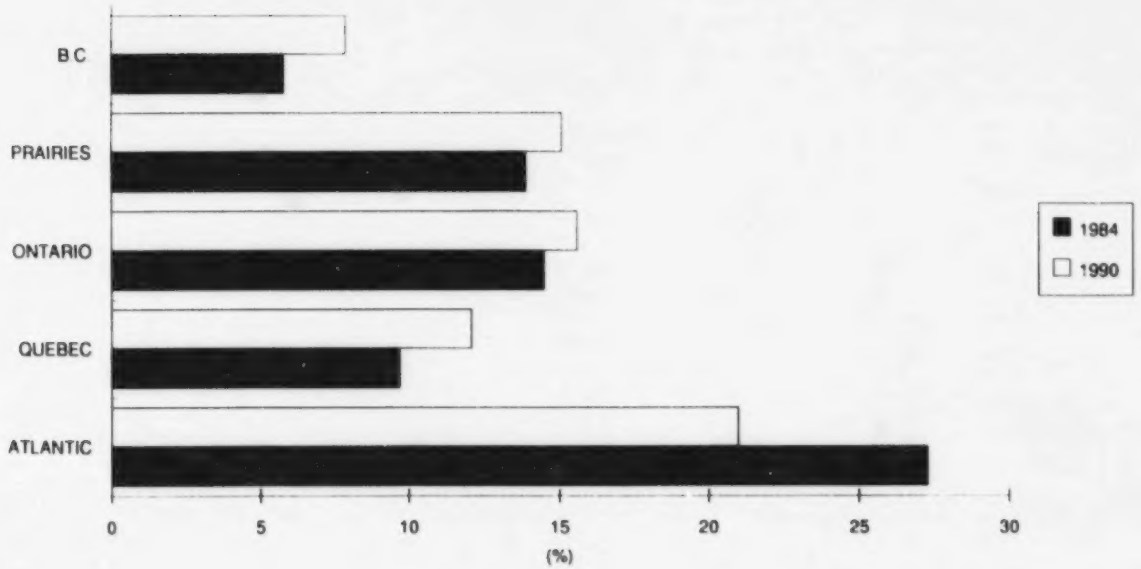


Figure 17
Response of Schools to Parents' Concerns

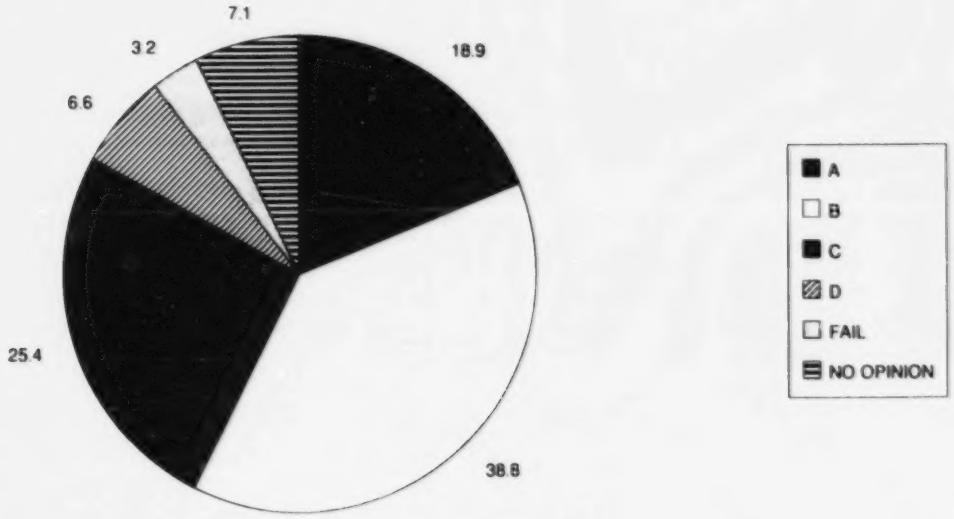


Figure 18
Preparation of Students for the Workforce

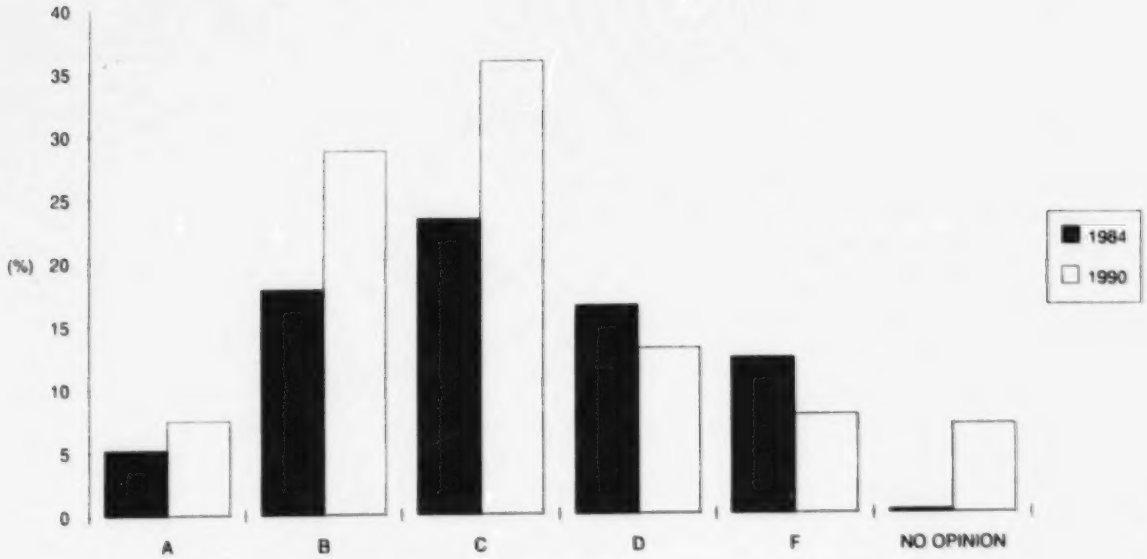


Figure 19
Preparation of Students for the Workforce - Number of A's Assigned

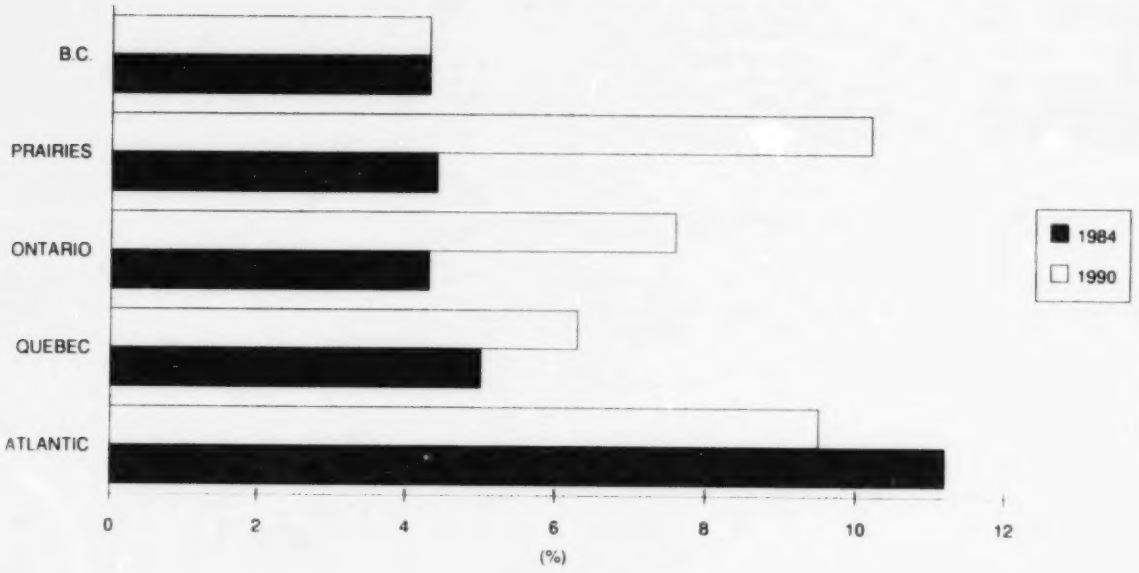
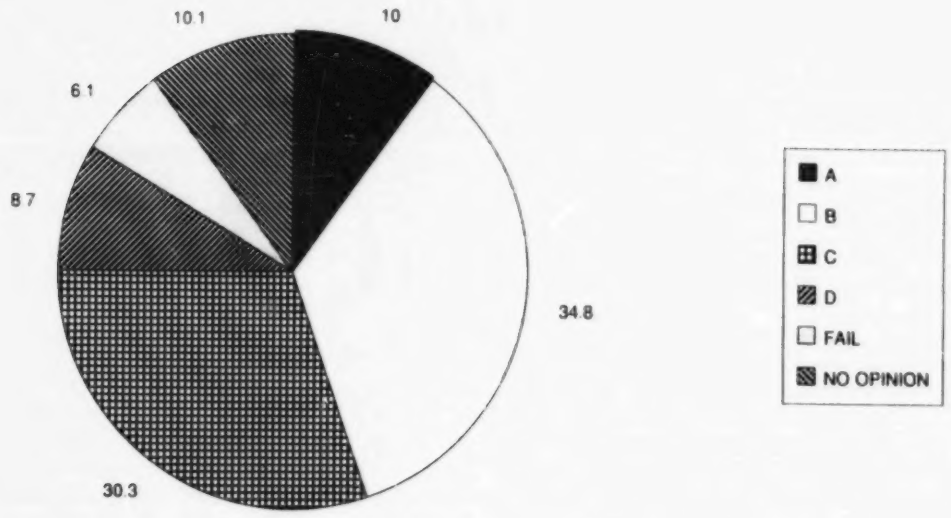


Figure 20
Preparation of Girls for Science, Math and Technology



of A and B grades was awarded. Between 1984 and 1990, respondents in Atlantic Canada, although still positive, assigned more B's and fewer C's.

There was also an aggregate increase in the percentage of C's assigned to schools on the preparation of students for the workforce. Furthermore, the number of respondents assigning D's and F's here dropped by nearly 10 percentage points. Respondents in 1990 were also much less ambivalent than their counterparts in 1984, when nearly one-quarter said they had no opinion about the schools' ability to prepare students for the workforce. Only 7% of people polled in the current survey had no opinion. In terms of all questions in this cluster, the strongest negative views were expressed on this question. Again, respondents from communities of a million or more gave the lowest number of A or B grades and the highest numbers of D's or Failures. At the other end of the spectrum, residents of communities of ten thousand or fewer gave the highest number of A and B grades to schools for their performance on this question.

Preparation of Girls in Science, Mathematics and Technology

In general, respondents were satisfied with the preparation of girls in science, mathematics and technology. Slightly over 75% graded the schools at C or higher and almost 45% awarded an A or a B. Grades of D or F were awarded by 14.8% of respondents. (See Figure 20.)

Table 2

Sex vs Preparation of Girls for Careers in Science , Math and Technology

	A	B	C	D/Fail	No Opinion
			(Percentages)		
Male	7.5	37.3	31.0	13.3	10.8
Female	12.7	32.2	29.5	16.3	9.3

When the responses were examined in more depth, several interesting points were revealed. Answers appear to be related very strongly to age, education level, occupation, sex, native language and region of domicile.

The oldest and youngest respondents, i.e., those in the 18-24 and the 65 or older age groups assigned the highest grades to the school system for the preparation of girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology. As indicated earlier, there was also a relatively high number of individuals, particularly 35 years of age and upwards, who had no opinion on this matter. In the authors' opinion, this might indicate that media and corporate campaigns to increase public awareness of the need for better-trained science, math and technology graduates, particularly females, have not fully reached or been accepted by their audiences. The strongest negative feelings on this matter were expressed by the 45-54 age group, among which 18.5% gave the schools either a D or a Failure.

There would appear to be a strong relationship between the education level attained by the respondents and the grades assigned on the question of preparing girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology. The highest number of A grades were given by people with public school, elementary school or a small amount of secondary school education, and by those who classify themselves as being still at school. Similarly, individuals with vocational or technical college, some university preparation or a university degree gave the lowest number of A's.

Professionals, executives and business owners gave, by far, the lowest number of A and B grades to the system's success in the preparation of girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology.

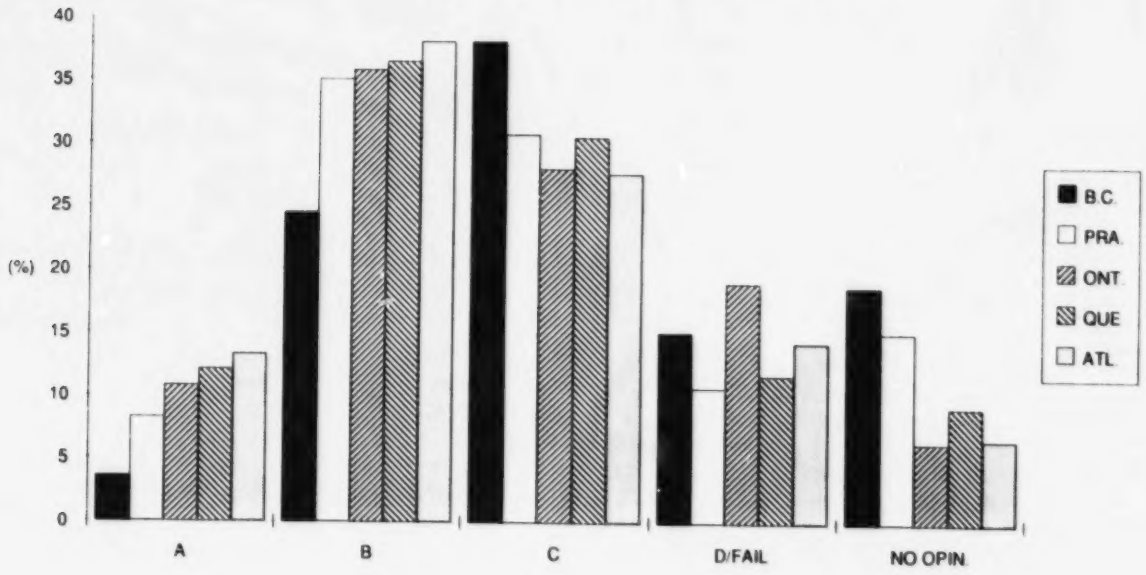
Females gave the school system a higher percentage of A grades (12.7%) than males (7.5%), but the total number of A and B grades was almost the same — 44.8% for male respondents and 44.9% for females.

It is interesting to note that those who classified themselves as having a French background gave a greater number of A and B grades than any other ethnic group: nearly 54% assigned A or B to the system on the preparation of girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology. Similarly, those whose mother tongue is French also gave significantly higher grades to the school system than anglophones.

On this variable, as in others, regional differences appeared. British Columbians were much less likely to assign A grades to their system than any other region. They were also much more likely to assign C and to have no opinion. (See Figure 21).

Respondents in communities of over one million assigned the smallest number of A or B grades and the highest number of D or Failing grades. It is also here that the highest percentage of "no opinion" responses was recorded. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the responses of people with children in elementary or secondary school and those without.

Figure 21
Preparation of Girls for Careers in Science, Math and Technology



Preparation for Post-secondary Education

Respondents in general felt that schools were doing a good job in preparing students for post-secondary education: 81% assigned A, B, or C grades. Indeed, as seen in Figure 22, satisfaction levels have increased over the past six years, as evidenced by the greater percentages of A and B awarded in 1990 than 1984.

Historical comparisons revealed that people polled in 1990 were much more positive about their schools' ability to prepare students for post-secondary studies than the group surveyed six years ago. The number of respondents assigning a B or above in fact jumped from just under 35% in 1984 to nearly 53% in 1990, while the number of respondents giving their schools a failing grade was nearly cut in half (6.9% in 1984 compared to 3.8% in 1990.)

When these responses are examined according to several demographic variables, there appears to be a strong relationship between the answer elicited and the region of domicile and occupation. Professionals, executives and owners of businesses, together with office workers, were more likely to assign fewer A grades to their schools' ability to prepare students for post-secondary studies than

Figure 22
Preparation of Students for Post-Secondary Studies

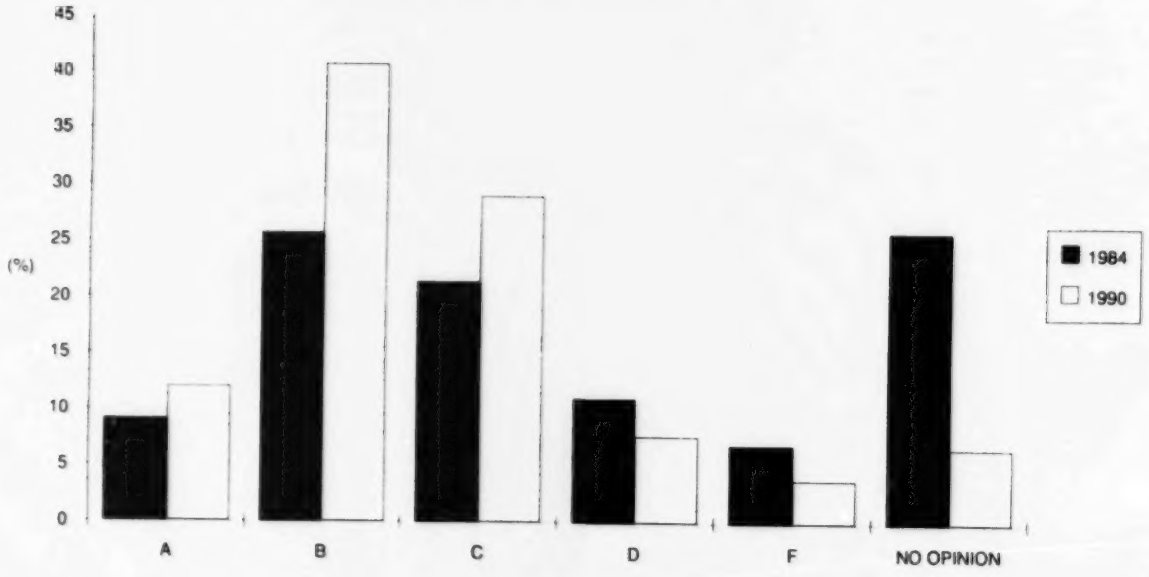
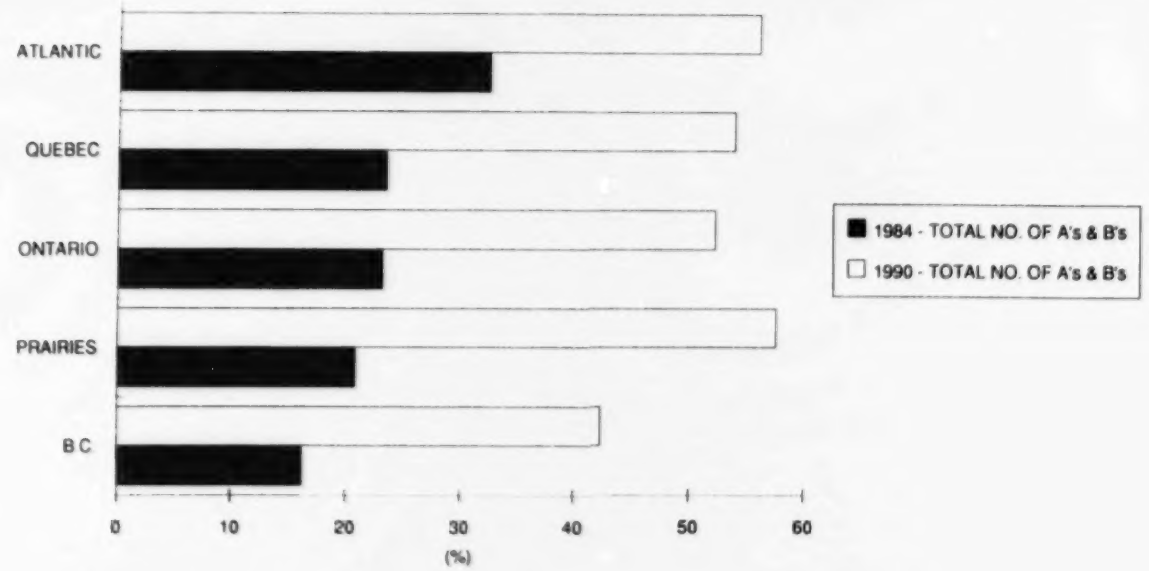


Figure 23
Preparation of Students for Post-Secondary Education



all other groups. Similarly, professionals, executives and owners of a business were also more likely to assign a grade of D or Fail to the system; almost 20% gave the school system a failing grade.

On a regional basis, the smallest number of A's and B's (42.4%) and the highest number of C's were given in British Columbia. In comparison, the highest number of A and B grades were given in the Prairies (57.6%.) Significantly, the total percentage of A and B grades increased in each region of the country over 1984. (See Figure 23.)

Again on the question of schools' ability to prepare students for post-secondary studies, the highest degree of dissatisfaction, as seen in the assignment of D or Failing grades, was found in communities of over one million. Here, also, the lowest number of A's and B's were allotted. In the smallest communities, respondents gave a much higher proportion of A or B grades to the school system on this question.

There is a popular belief that because of high tax rates and their impact on our older citizens, the 65 years or older group is much more critical of our school systems than the general population. In point of fact, that appears not to be the case. For instance, on each of the variables reviewed in this section, respondents aged 65 or over assigned the schools the smallest percentage of D grades and in all but two of the categories awarded the highest number of A's. No other age group consistently rated the schools as highly on these questions or assigned a smaller number of Failing grades!

ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL PERFORMANCE: STUDENT INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

General

The following cluster of questions was designed to elicit opinions on some aspects of the intellectual development of students and the degree to which respondents were satisfied with the performance of their community schools in their in each area. The questions covered a) learning skills and knowledge in science, mathematics and technology, b) learning to read, write and speak properly, c) learning problem-solving skills and d) developing a respect for lifelong learning.

Table 3

Aggregate Results: Student Intellectual Development

	Dissat.	Neither Dis. or Satis.	Satisfied
Learn Knowledge Sc/Mth/Tech	20.0%	12.1%	67.9%
Learn to Read,Write & Speak Properly	34.2%	7.3%	58.5%
Learn to Solve Problems	25.2%	12.1%	62.6%
Develop Respect for Lifelong Learning	30.6%	14.3%	55.1%

On an aggregate basis, the area that causes the most concern for respondents is performance in reading, writing and speaking: one-third (34%) of the population was dissatisfied with performance levels on this question. As for the schools' performance in developing a respect and love of lifelong learning, almost 31% of respondents were dissatisfied. On the learning of science skills, dissatisfaction levels were at the 20% level rising to 25% for the learning of problem-solving skills.

At this point, each of the questions in this intellectual development cluster will be reviewed to see which demographic variables appear to have the most effect on answers.

Learning Skills and Knowledge in Science, Mathematics and Technology

As can be seen from Table 3, 67.9% of respondents indicate that they were satisfied with the performance of the schools in the teaching of science, mathematics and technology. Again, given the high degree of concern expressed by both the media and high-profile, Canadian corporate leaders, this relatively high degree of satisfaction may be seen as somewhat surprising. As was seen in an earlier question on science mathematics and technology, the highest degree of satisfaction was expressed by the 18-24-year-old age group and by those 65 years of age or more.

Perhaps the demographic variables most significantly related to responses to the question about learning skills and knowledge in science, mathematics and technology were language and region. Individuals who identified themselves as French-speaking tended to have a lower degree of satisfaction (63.1%) than native speakers of English (67.5%). Further, when the region of domicile was examined, British Columbians and respondents from Ontario were the most dissatisfied with the schools' performance on this variable. The highest satisfaction levels were recorded in the Atlantic Region and the Prairies. (See Figure 24.)

People with the lowest educational level were the least dissatisfied with the performance of the schools in the area of learning skills and knowledge in science, mathematics and technology, and, similarly, the most satisfied of all respondents. Professionals, executives and owners of businesses were significantly more dissatisfied (26.1%) than the average of all other groups on this variable (20%).

As found in many of the previous questions, residents of cities of one million or more expressed higher dissatisfaction levels (23.5%) than any other size community. The responses among the other three types of communities showed no significant differences.

It is interesting to note that respondents with children in secondary school showed a higher satisfaction level than those who do not have children in secondary schools. Similarly, those with children currently enrolled in elementary schools showed a higher degree of satisfaction with the performance of the schools on this variable than those without and, in addition, registered a significantly lower level of dissatisfaction with the schools and their ability to teach skills and knowledge in science, mathematics and technology.

School Performance - Ensuring that Students Learn to Read, Write and Speak Properly

In expressing their dissatisfaction with the schools in ensuring that students learn to read, write and speak properly, respondents were less ambivalent than on any other question in this cluster. In fact, 34.2% of respondents were dissatisfied with their school's performance in this area, the highest rate of all the questions in this cluster. (See Figure 25.)

On further analysis, it was found that responses to this item were related to age, marital status, region, native language, and whether or not respondents have a child attending elementary school.

Those in the youngest age group (18-24) had the lowest dissatisfaction levels (18.7%) and highest satisfaction levels (72.0%) with the performance of the schools on this question. At the other end of the spectrum, those 56 years of age or older had by far the highest dissatisfaction levels (46.5%). Interestingly, this is the only variable on which older respondents expressed a higher degree of dissatisfaction than other age groups, as can be seen from the bar chart. (See Figure 26.)

Francophones tended to express a lower percentage of satisfied responses (49.8%) than anglophones (61.1%) and they were also more likely to express no opinion on this matter.

Respondents in the Prairies and Atlantic Canada had far larger percentages of satisfied opinions than other regions. Residents of Ontario and Quebec were far more dissatisfied with the performance of the schools in ensuring that students learn to read, write and speak properly.

The final demographic variable on which a significant difference was found in this question was whether or not the respondent had a child in elementary school. Those with a child in elementary school had a far higher level of satisfaction (65.1%) than those without (55.8%). Interestingly, no significant difference was found in the responses of those with a child in secondary school and those without.

Figure 24
Learning Skills in Science, Math and Technology - Regional Breakdown

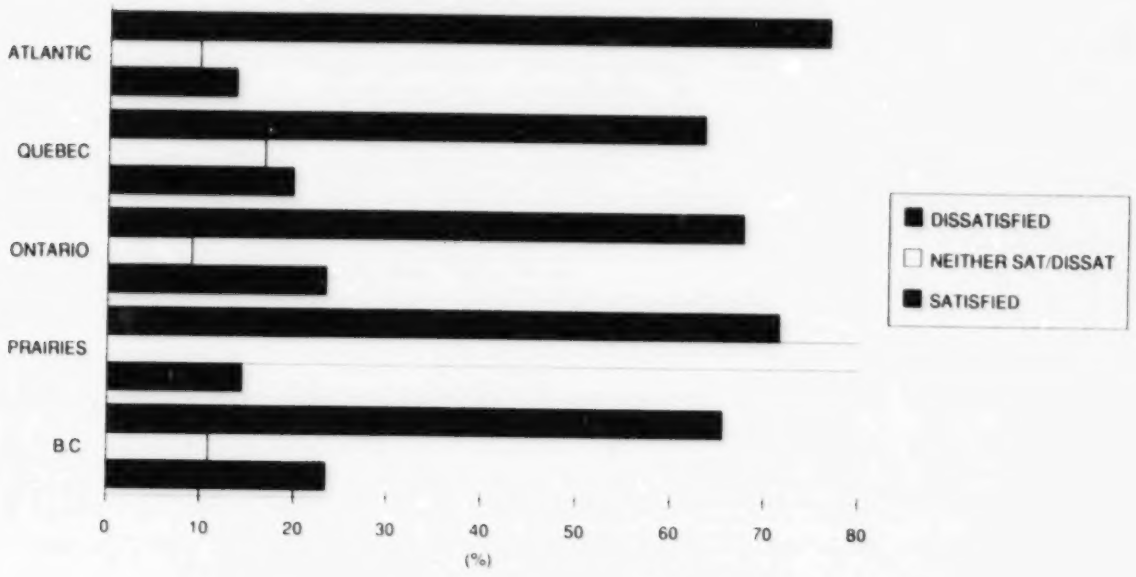
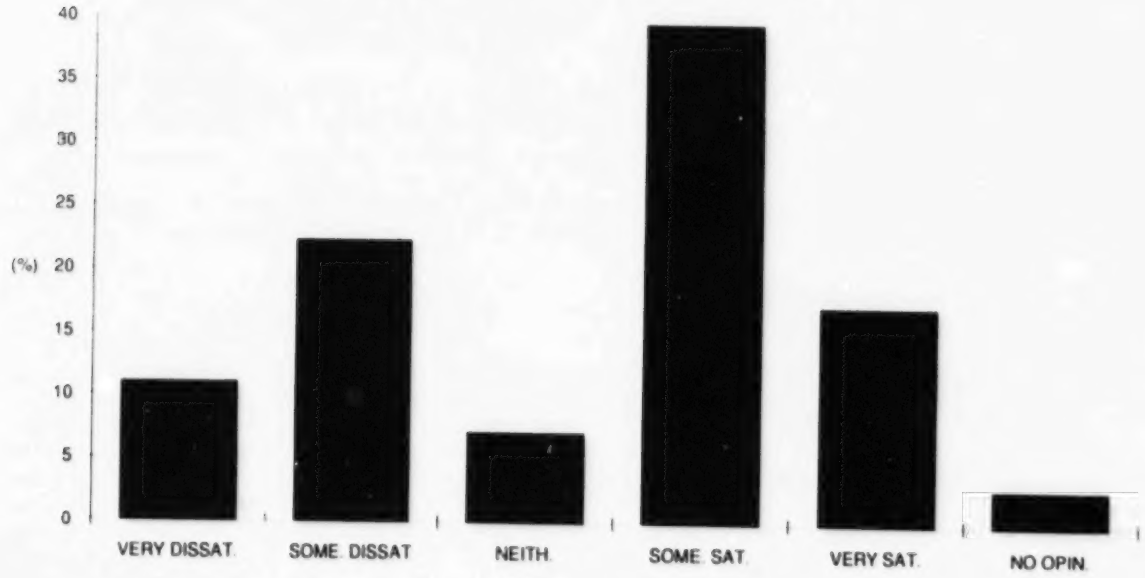


Figure 25
Learn to Read, Write and Speak Properly



School Performance - Ensuring that Students Learn Problem-solving Skills

More than twice as many respondents (62.6%) expressed satisfaction with the school's performance in ensuring that students learn problem-solving skills than expressed dissatisfaction (25.2%).

Significant differences in the answers to this question were revealed on a number of different demographic variables: age, occupation, native language, region, community size and whether or not the respondent had a child attending elementary school.

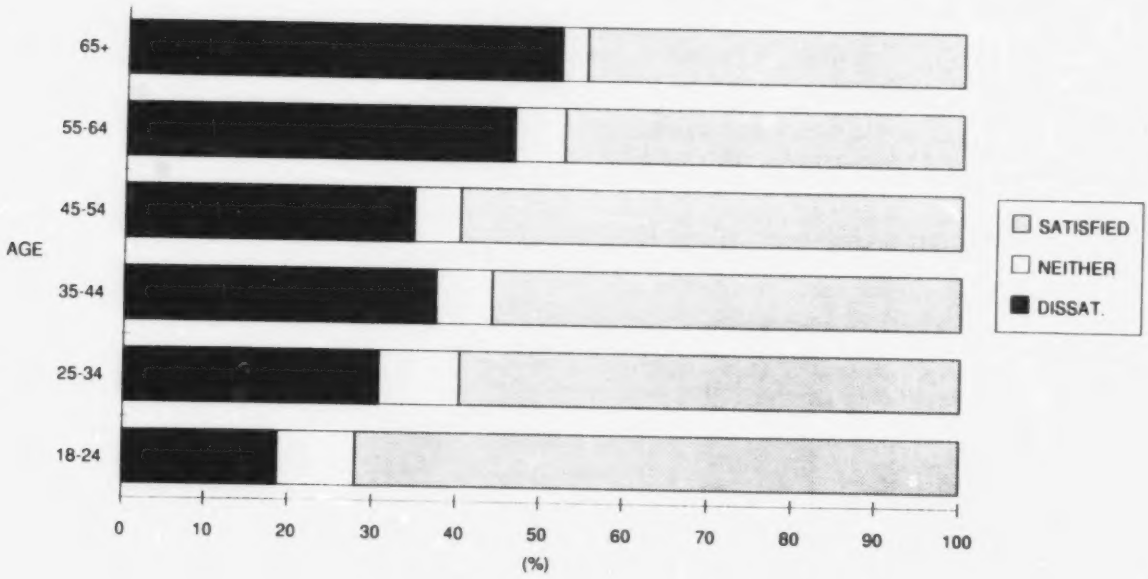
The youngest group of respondents (18-24 years) expressed a significantly higher degree of satisfaction with the schools than other age groups; the highest degree of dissatisfaction was found in the 50-64-year-old age group.

Compared to other occupations, professionals, executives and owners of businesses gave a significantly lower approval rating to the schools in ensuring that students learn problem-solving skills. Respondents whose first language is French also expressed a higher dissatisfaction level (29.2%) than their English-speaking counterparts (24%.)

The Prairies had significantly lower levels of dissatisfaction (16.9%), whereas Quebec had the lowest percentage of satisfaction with schools' performance in teaching problem-solving skills (52.7%).

As on many previous questions, residents of areas of over one million expressed dissatisfaction at levels that were statistically significant. The highest degree of satisfaction with the performance of the schools in this variable was found in communities of 10,000-99,999 people. Finally, people with children in elementary schools were far more positive in their responses to this question (70.6%) than respondents who did not have children in elementary schools (59.6%). No significant differences were found between respondents with children in secondary schools and those without.

Figure 26
Learn to Read, Write and Speak Properly



School Performance - Ensuring that Students Develop a Respect and Love of Lifelong Learning

Almost one-third of the population (30.6%) expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the schools in ensuring that students develop a respect and love of lifelong learning. In comparison with all other questions in this cluster, respondents gave the lowest percentage of satisfied responses (55.1%) here.

Residents of the Atlantic provinces graded their schools the highest on this question (64.7%) while respondents in British Columbia gave the lowest percentage of satisfied answers (48%).

In answering this question, respondents from populations of one million or more gave a far higher percentage of dissatisfied answers (36.8%) than other regions (30.8%). Residents of communities of under 10,000 or rural areas responded the most positively to this question. Finally, people with children in elementary school were significantly less dissatisfied than those without. No significant differences were found between respondents with children in secondary school and those without.

HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The 1990 opinion poll asked a series of five questions about the human and social development of students. Specifically, respondents were asked to register their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction about their school's ability to teach students to 1) tolerate, respect and co-operate with others, 2) develop a sense of self-worth and confidence, 3) show personal initiative and self-discipline, 4) accept people of different races and cultures and 5) deal with social issues such as sex, drugs and alcohol.

Table 4

Aggregate Results: Human and Social Development

	Very Dissat.	Some Dissat.	Neither Dis./Sat.	Some Satis.	Very Satis.	No opinion
Tolerate, respect, co-operate	8.4%	19.8%	10.3%	44%	14.8%	2.8%
Self-worth, confidence	5.%	15.8%	12.4%	50.9%	12.8%	3.1%
Personal initiative, self-discipline	8.8%	21.%	12.8%	46.3%	7.8%	3.3%
Racial tolerance	6.6%	13.1%	10.1%	45.7%	21.3%	3.3%
Learn to deal with social issues	9.3%	16.%	10.3%	40.8%	20.2%	3.4%

Overall, respondents were quite positive about their schools and human and social development. More than 50% of the respondents to these five questions said that they were either "somewhat" or "very" satisfied. Those polled were most positive on their school's ability to instil racial tolerance and to teach students how to cope with social issues. More than 20% of the respondents to each of these two questions said they were very satisfied.

Respondents were also positive, overall, about the human and social development of students, but there was some dissatisfaction. This was most marked in the questions about students tolerating, respecting and co-operating with others and about showing a sense of personal initiative and self-discipline. In both cases, nearly 30% of respondents said they were either very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with their schools' performance.

Here is a more detailed discussion of the associations revealed between these questions and certain demographic groups.

Tolerate, Respect and Co-operate with Others

More than half of all people polled were at least somewhat satisfied with their local schools' ability to teach students to tolerate, respect and co-operate with others. Cross-tabulations revealed that this sentiment was fairly evenly spread across all age categories. In every age group, more than 50% of respondents were satisfied with their school here. On the negative side, the cross-tabulations also revealed that respondents in the second oldest age category (55-64) were more likely to be dissatisfied with the performance of their schools (40.4% of respondents in this age group) than any other age category.

Also demonstrated here was a very strong relationship between ethnic background and the answer to this question about the schools' ability to instil tolerance, respect and co-operation. Respondents of Anglo-saxon ancestry were among those most likely (65.7%) to be satisfied with their schools' performance in this area. By the same token, this group was least likely to indicate dissatisfaction (26.3%). French-Canadians were the most ambivalent here; this group had the highest number of respondents who were neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with their schools' performance (16.8%).

Cross-tabulations on the basis of language, however, revealed that francophones were much more likely to be dissatisfied (34.1%) and much less likely to be satisfied (49.3%) with the performance of their school on this question than their English-speaking counterparts. Nearly two-thirds of anglophones polled said they were satisfied, but fewer than half of the francophones felt this way.

Following the pattern seen when native language was taken into account, Quebec stood out in the regional calculations as being the region least likely to be satisfied with their schools' performance in instilling respect, tolerance and co-operation (51%). Respondents from the Atlantic region were much more likely to be positive (71.3%) on this question. At the other end of the spectrum, residents of the Prairies and British Columbia were least likely to say they were dissatisfied. Just over 20% of the respondents from each of these two regions gave negative responses. (See Figure 27.)

As in cross-tabulations with other questions, there was an inverse relationship between community size and a positive response. Respondents from large, urban centres were least likely to be satisfied and most likely to be dissatisfied. This contrasts to the rural respondents who were most likely to be satisfied (67%) and least likely to be dissatisfied (just under one-quarter of all the respondents).

Develop a Sense of Self-worth and Confidence

Respondents were overwhelmingly confident about their school's ability to instil a sense of self-worth and confidence in students. Just under two-thirds of all respondents answered positively. Fewer than one-quarter said they were dissatisfied.

Cross-tabulations with demographic characteristics revealed that respondents in the 55-64 age category were most likely to be dissatisfied with their schools' ability to instil self-worth and confidence. Ironically, the youngest age category (18-24, many of whom are probably still students) also felt negatively about their schools' ability to instil in them a sense of tolerance. (See Figure 28.)

In fact, on school's developing a student's self-worth and confidence, fewer people (59.9%) in the 18-24 age category said they were satisfied than any other age group. There was also some relationship revealed between income and the response to this question. The highest level of satisfaction (nearly three-quarters of all respondents) was expressed by people making between $45,000 and $55,000 a year (74%). Those in the second lowest income ($15,000-$25,000) category

Figure 27
Students Tolerate, Respect and Cooperate with One Another

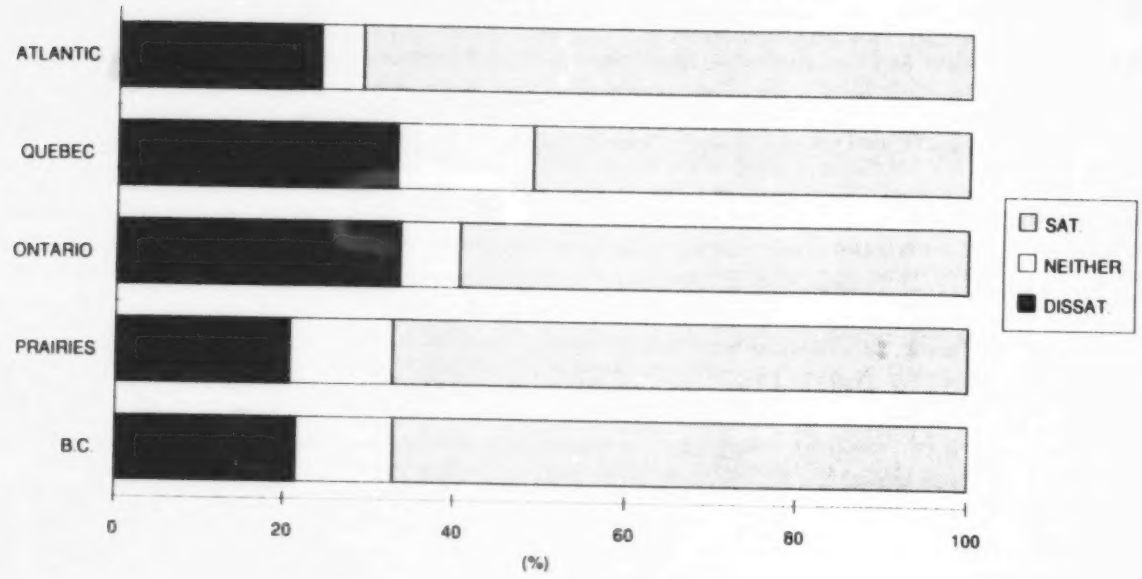
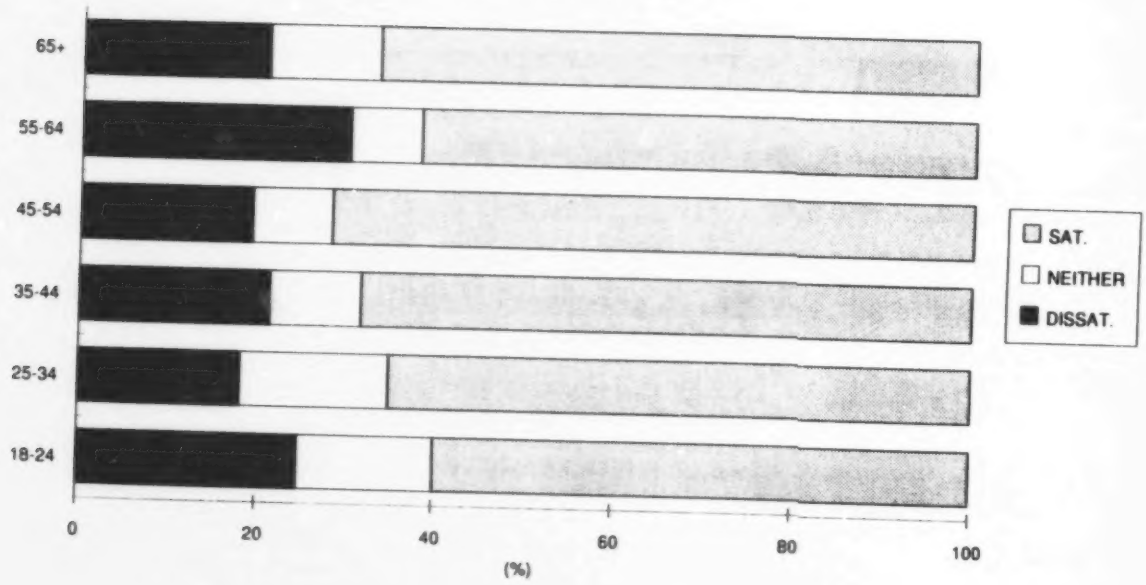


Figure 28
Develop Self-Worth and Confidence



were far less optimistic. Just over 64 per cent of them said they were satisfied, the lowest figure among all income groups.

Again a strong relationship was noted between status as homeowner or renter and the response to this question. Homeowners were more likely to be satisfied and less likely to be dissatisfied than tenants. As well, a strongly positive relationship was noted between marital status and the response to this question. More married respondents (69.6%) were satisfied than single respondents (58.1%).

Mother tongue was also associated with the perception of a school's ability to instil a sense of self-worth and confidence in students. Anglophones (67.3%) were more likely to be satisfied than were French-speaking respondents (59.3%). However, there was no divergence between English- and French-speakers on dissatisfaction: over 21% from each linguistic group gave negative responses.

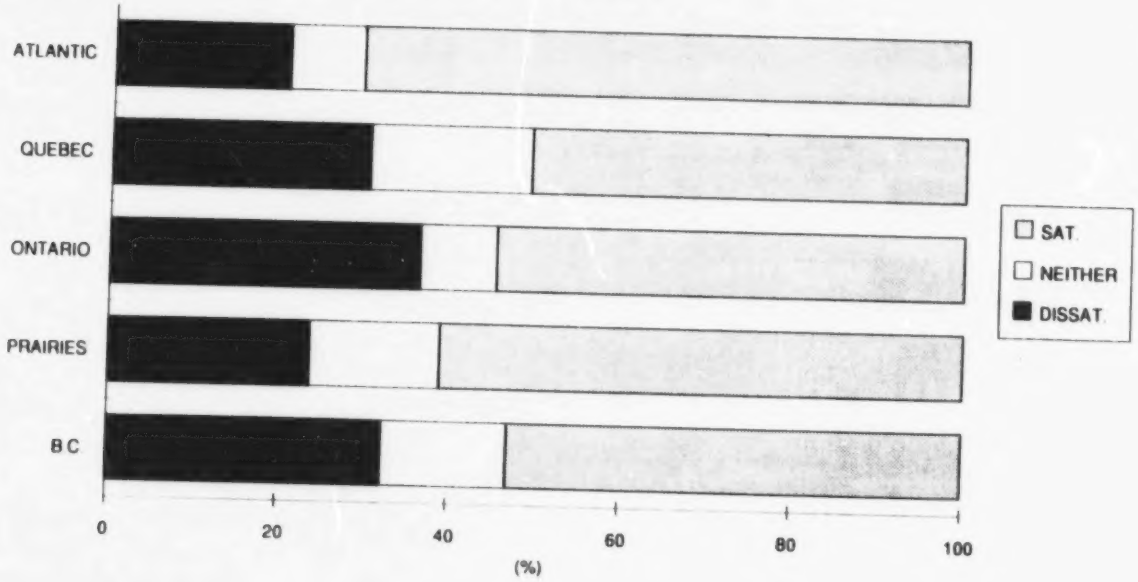
Although there was some association between region of domicile and perception of a school's ability to instil self-worth and confidence in students, only the Prairies had a relationship that was statistically significant. Residents of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba were among those most likely to be satisfied and least likely (15%) to be dissatisfied. Again, there was a strong inverse relationship between community size and a positive response to the question. Nearly three-quarters of all rural inhabitants were satisfied while nearly one-quarter of the respondents from large urban areas were dissatisfied.

Show Personal Initiative and Self-discipline

A little over one-half of all respondents (54.1%) felt that their schools did a satisfactory job of instilling in their students personal initiative and self-discipline. However, 29.8% of all respondents were not satisfied with their schools' performance on this item.

There was an overwhelmingly positive relationship between region of origin and his/her perception of the school's ability to instil personal initiative and self-discipline. Nearly three-quarters of the respondents from the Atlantic region said they were satisfied with their school's performance in this area. This was nearly ten percentage points higher than the next most positive region—the Prairies, where over 61.1% of respondents were satisfied with their schools. Ontario (36.5%) expressed the most dissatisfaction of any region. (Refer to Figure 29.)

Figure 29
Personal Initiative and Self-Discipline



Broken down on the basis of language, there was not much difference between the responses of English and French-speakers. In both cases, around 30% said they were dissatisfied with their schools' ability to foster a sense of personal initiative and self-discipline. English-speaking respondents were, however, slightly more likely to say they were satisfied with their schools (nearly 58%) than their French-speaking counterparts (50.2%).

Rural residents were again more positive about the ability of their schools to foster personal initiative and self-discipline. Some 61% from rural areas said they were satisfied with their schools, but only 48% from large cities were satisfied. The second oldest age category (55-64) was again the most likely to express dissatisfaction with the schools' performance and the least likely to say they were satisfied.

Accepting People of Different Cultures and Races

Generally, respondents were satisfied with their school's ability to foster students' acceptance of people of different cultures and races; only 20% said they were dissatisfied. Given the current level of concern in the media about racism, this finding could be seen as somewhat surprising. Cross-tabulations revealed some relationship between age and the answer to this question. However, among individual age categories there were no significant relationships.

There was a strong relationship between marital status and perception of a school's ability to teach racial tolerance. Nearly three-quarters of all married respondents thought that schools did a satisfactory job. Single people or those in common-law relationships, on the other hand, were most likely to be dissatisfied.

Also noted was a significant association between ethnicity or region of origin and perception of the school's ability to instil racial tolerance in pupils. Native Canadians and people of Asian and Middle-Eastern origin were the most likely of any ethnic group to say that they were dissatisfied with their school's performance. By the same token, these respondents, who constitute some of Canada's visible minorities, were least likely to say they were satisfied with their school's ability to instil racial tolerance.

Learn to Deal with Social Issues

As in all the other questions related to the human and social development of students, the majority were positive about the schools' ability to teach students to cope with social issues — such as sex and drug and alcohol abuse. Just under two-thirds (61%) registered satisfaction while a little over one-quarter (25.3%) were not satisfied.

A strong relationship was revealed between age and perception of the success of schools in teaching students to deal with social issues. Older respondents were much more likely to be dissatisfied than younger ones. Nearly 40% of all 55-64-year-olds were dissatisfied as opposed to only 16.6% of the 35-44 age group. Similarly, younger respondents were much more likely to be satisfied. Nearly three-quarters of those in the 35-44 age category, for example, said they were satisfied with their schools. (See Figure 30.)

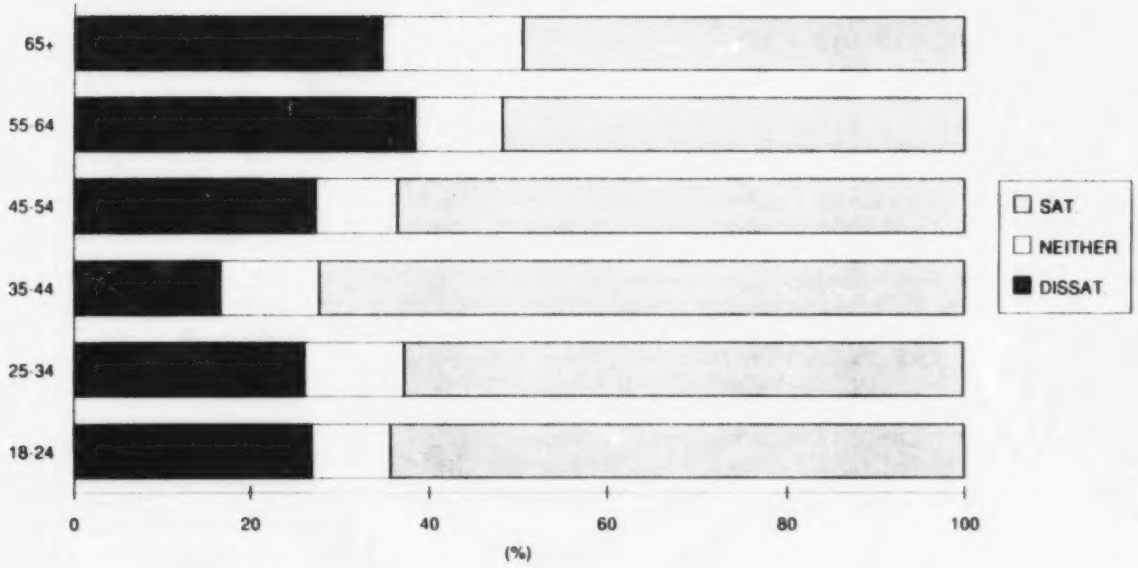
People with higher incomes were more likely to register satisfaction than those with lower incomes. Nearly 75% of respondents making $45,000-$55,000 said they were satisfied. At the same time, only 18.7% in this same income bracket expressed dissatisfaction, the lowest in all income brackets.

The unemployed were more likely to be dissatisfied with schools than people with a job. Two-thirds of all employed respondents were satisfied as opposed to 56% of those who were not working.

English-speaking respondents (65.3%) were more likely than their French-speaking counterparts (56.2%) to express satisfaction with their school's ability to teach students how to cope with

social issues. Nearly one-third of all French-speaking respondents were dissatisfied. Although there was no overall relationship established in either case, the survey revealed that people with the lowest level of education and people living in large urban centres were more likely to be dissatisfied with their school on this question.

Figure 30
Learn to Deal with Social Issues



SUMMARY OF SELECTED DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Children in Elementary School

To many questions, people with children in elementary school gave responses that were significantly different from those of people without. In all of these questions, people with children in elementary school were far more likely to give high grades to the school system or to be satisfied with the performance of the school. Thus, they were less likely to say that the performance of schools had worsened in the past five years and were far more likely to grade them A or B. They were also far more likely to give a grade of A to teachers and a grade of A or B to the following: responsiveness of schools to parents' concerns, preparation for the workplace, the education of students in science and mathematics, as well as teaching students to read and write and to solve problems. There also was a much greater tendency for people in this category to give a higher number of satisfactory grades on the performance of schools in some social issues, such as ensuring that students tolerate, respect and co-operate with others, develop a sense of self-worth and confidence, show personal initiative and self-discipline, and learn to deal with social issues such as sex, drugs and alcohol.

In contrast (with the exception of a very small number of variables), parents of students in secondary school did not respond significantly differently from those who do not have offspring in secondary schools. It certainly suggests to the writers that the strongest allies of the school systems are those people with children in our elementary schools. It might be suggested that the secondary schools have a challenge ahead of them to increase the satisfaction or awareness of the parents of secondary school students.

Region

Different regions often produced different responses that were statistically significant. Respondents from the Prairies were the most positive towards their schools, followed by those from Atlantic Canada. Further, these two regions viewed the effectiveness of teachers more positively, the responsiveness of the schools to parental concerns more positively, and were much more positive towards the performance of the schools in teaching children to read and write, problem-solve, tolerate others and develop a sense of self-worth, and show personal initiative and self-discipline.

In assigning an overall rating to community schools, Quebeckers tended to give their schools more failing grades and fewer A's and B's than did other regions. Quebec respondents were dissatisfied with the performance of their schools in ensuring that students learn to read, write and speak properly, and were dissatisfied on the question of problem-solving skills and tolerance, respect and co-operation with others. Ontarians gave the lowest grade or expressed dissatisfaction at a level higher than did other provinces on more variables than any other province.

British Columbians gave the fewest A and B grades for the perceived effectiveness of teachers, the preparation of girls in science, mathematics and technology, and the preparation of students for the workforce. Respondents from British Columbia also disagreed a higher percentage of the time with prevailing national opinion on the success of schools in preparing students for the workplace. Finally, British Columbia residents were more positive than people from any other region that the schools were doing a very satisfactory job in ensuring that students develop tolerance, respect, and the ability to co-operate with others.

Language

Francophones tended to be less enthusiastic about their schools than their anglophone counterparts, assigning a statistically significant number of lower grades to the performance of schools in their community. French-speakers assigned lower grades to schools on their responsiveness to parents' concerns, on the success of the schools in teaching science, mathematics, and technology skills to students, and on their ability to teach students to read, write and problem-solve. They also

tended to have fewer satisfactory responses when grading their school's in developing a respect and love for lifelong learning. Francophones gave far fewer satisfactory grades to the schools in ensuring that students tolerate, respect and co-operate with others, develop a sense of self-worth and confidence, show personal initiative and self-discipline, and learn to deal with social issues such as sex, drugs and alcohol. On the other hand, French-speakers were far more positive than the average in rating the schools in encouraging and preparing girls for careers based in science, mathematics and technology, and they were more satisfied than the average with the value that the province receives for its money spent on education.

Community Size

The degree of dissatisfaction with the performance of schools noted by respondents in areas of one million population or more was alarming. They tended to be much more negative in assessing the performance of their community schools. Similarly, they gave far fewer A and B grades to the effectiveness of teachers, and they gave a higher percentage of D's and Failures and the lowest number of A's and B's to the responsiveness of schools to parents' concerns. In our largest population areas, responses to the evaluation of the schools in preparing students for post-secondary education showed the smallest numbers of A's and B's and the highest number of failing grades. And in grading the school's ability to teach problem-solving, respect for lifelong learning, tolerance for others, developing a sense of self-worth, and ensuring that students show personal initiative and self-discipline, respondents from areas of one million population or more indicated the highest degree of dissatisfaction and the lowest satisfaction levels.

Age

It is worth noting that comments in the media sometimes suggest that our older citizens (65 years and up) have a tendency to be more critical of the school systems in their communities than the norm. In fact, this survey suggests that our older citizens respond very closely to the average respondent in Canada. They tend to be, together with the 18-24-year-old group, more positive about the schools' responsiveness to parents' concerns and their preparation of girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology than the average. There are two areas where the performance of schools evoked responses among the post-65 age group that might be classed as dissatisfaction: in teaching students to read, write and speak properly, and in ensuring that students learn to deal with social issues such as sex, drugs and alcohol.

It is interesting to note that the 18-24 age group gave the highest grades to the school system of any age group for schools' responsiveness to parents' concerns, to the preparation of girls for careers in science, mathematics and technology, to teaching students how to read and write and speak, and to teaching students problem-solving skills.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

A strong majority of Canadians polled expressed overall satisfaction with the schools in their communities. Most people gave the schools in their community a B (39%) or C (35%), suggesting a relatively high degree of satisfaction with schools. Some 29% of the population indicated that schools have improved over the past four years, 20% indicated they have become worse, and 42% said they have stayed the same.

Two out of every three people polled see their provincial government as somewhat (56%) or strongly (10%) committed to maintaining a high quality educational system and almost one-half of the respondents felt that the government received good (39%) or excellent (9%) value for its education dollar.

the respondents felt that the government received good (39%) or excellent (9%) value for its education dollar.

Perceptions of the biggest problems schools face included drug and alcohol abuse (17%), discipline (11%), preparation for the workplace (9%) and improving basic skills (9%). The most positive assessments (grade A and B combined) were accorded to the effectiveness of the teaching staff and the responsiveness of the teachers to parents' concerns about their children. However, respondents indicated relatively high degrees of dissatisfaction with performance in reading, writing and speaking (22% somewhat dissatisfied, 11% very dissatisfied).

This report might be seen to indicate substantial room for improvement, both generally and in some particular areas. In the opinion of the authors, secondary schools should review the finding that parents with children in secondary schools do not have opinions of the school system which differ greatly from those of the public at large. This could be seen as symptomatic of a problem.

Schools in jurisdictions with over one million population are also viewed more negatively in an alarming number of cases. The writers suggest that the high degree of dissatisfaction felt with many large American systems is increasingly being felt in Canadian metropolitan areas.

Finally, we need to address the issue of the public's perceptions of the quality of our schools' performance in general as well as in specific areas — and take heed of the views of the media as well as corporate spokespersons. The media's critical—perhaps overly critical — assessments, often based on single incidents, have already been mentioned. But, in the authors' eyes, we must also question the efficacy of the efforts of some corporations, and in some instances, governments, to convince Canadians, such as those in this poll, that we indeed do have problems that could affect our productivity and world economic position in the future. The answers to the questions in this 1990 poll suggest that the messages of corporate leaders, government spokespersons, media commentators and others about the quality of education that Canadian school children receive in science, mathematics and technology simply is not registering on the Canadian public. If there is a problem, and the authors believe there is, then other methods of mobilizing the Canadian public to be concerned about this matter need to be considered.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONS ASKED IN DECIMA OPINION POLL

1 Would you say that the *public* schools in your community have improved, becoming worse, or stayed the same in the past five years?

Become worse ---------- 1
Stayed the same ---------- 2
Improved ---------- 3

---

2 Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, or Fail to indicate the quality of their work. If the *public* schools in your community were graded in the same way, what grade would you give them — A, B, C, D or Fail?

A ---------- 1
B ---------- 2
C ---------- 3
D ---------- 4
Fail ---------- 5
* IF DON'T KNOW/NO OPINION, SKIP TO PREAMBLE BEFORE Q4

---

3 And what would you say is your *main* reason for giving *public* schools in your community this grade? (PROBE ... ACCEPT ONLY *ONE* RESPONSE ... RESPONSE MUST BE AT LEAST *TEN* WORDS)

Again, thinking about the schools in your community, I'd like you to tell me whether you give them a grade of A, B, C, D, or Fail in each of the following areas. The first area is... (READ AND ROTATE ITEMS 4 TO 8)

4 The effectiveness of the teaching staff

A ---------- 1
B ---------- 2
C ---------- 3
D ---------- 4
Fail ---------- 5

---

5 The responsiveness of the staff to parents' concerns about their children

A ---------- 1
B ---------- 2
C ---------- 3
D ---------- 4
Fail ---------- 5

---

6 Preparing students for positions in the workforce

A ---------- 1
B ---------- 2
C ---------- 3
D ---------- 4
Fail ---------- 5

7 Encouraging and preparing girls for careers based in science, mathematics and technology

A ---- 1
B ---- 2
C ---- 3
D ---- 4
Fail ---- 5

8 Preparing students for post-secondary studies

A ---- 1
B ---- 2
C ---- 3
D ---- 4
F ---- 5

END OF ROTATION

Thinking about the schools in your community, one the their most important goals is the intellectual development of the students. For each of the following could you tell me whether you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the performance of schools in your community in each area? The first is ensuring that students ... (READ AND ROTATE ITEMS 9 TO 12)

9 Learn skills and knowledge in science, math and technology

Very dissatisfied ---- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---- 4
Very satisfied ---- 5

10 Learn to read, write, and speak properly

Very dissatisfied ---- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---- 4
Very satisfied ---- 5

11 Learn problem-solving skills

Very dissatisfied ---- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---- 4
Very satisfied ---- 5

12 Develop a respect and love of lifelong learning

Very dissatisfied ---- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---- 4
Very satisfied ---- 5

END OF ROTATION

Schools are involved with the community in the human and social development of students. For each of the following could you tell me whether you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the performance of schools in your community in each area? The first is ensuring that students ... (READ AND ROTATE ITEMS 13 TO 17)

13 Tolerate, respect and co-operate with others

Very dissatisfied ---------- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---------- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---------- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---------- 4
Very satisfied ---------- 5

14 Develop a sense of self-worth and confidence

Very dissatisfied ---------- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---------- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---------- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---------- 4
Very satisfied ---------- 5

15 Show personal initiative and self-discipline

Very dissatisfied ---------- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---------- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---------- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---------- 4
Very satisfied ---------- 5

16 Accept people of different cultures and races

Very dissatisfied ---------- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---------- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---------- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---------- 4
Very satisfied ---------- 5

17 Learn to deal with social issues, like sex, drugs and alcohol

Very dissatisfied ---------- 1
Somewhat dissatisfied ---------- 2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ---------- 3
Somewhat satisfied ---------- 4
Very satisfied ---------- 5

END OF ROTATION

18 **Thinking about the amount that the provincial government spends on education and the education that students receive, would you say that the province receives excellent, good, only fair, or poor value for its money?**

Poor value ---------- 1
Only fair value ---------- 2
Good value ---------- 3
Excellent value ---------- 4

---

19 **Would you say that the provincial government is strongly committed, somewhat committed, not too committed, or not at all committed to maintaining a high-quality public education system?**

Not at all committed ---------- 1
Not too committed ---------- 2
Somewhat committed ---------- 3
Strongly committed ---------- 4

---

20 **Do you have any children currently attending elementary school, including junior kindergarten?** (IF "YES," ASK "How many?")

No children in elementary school ---------- 1
1 ---------- 2
2 ----------3
3 ---------- 4
4 ---------- 5
5 or more ---------- 6

---

21 **Do you have any children currently attending secondary schools?** (IF "YES," ASK "How many?")

No children in secondary school---------- 1
1 ---------- 2
2 ---------- 3
3 ---------- 4
4 ---------- 5
5 or more ---------- 6

---

22 **What do you think is the biggest problem that the schools in your community should deal with?** (PROBE ... ACCEPT ONLY *ONE* RESPONSE)

_____
_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Region	Number	%
Atlantic Provinces	105	8.7
Quebec	315	26.2
Ontario	436	36.3
Prairies	205	17.1
British Columbia	139	11.6
Total	1200	100

Income	Number	%
Under $10,000	61	5.5
$10 - 19,999	154	14
$20 - 29,999	204	18.6
$30,000 +	681	61.9
Total	1100	100

Education	Number	%
Pub. elem. school	54	4.6
Some high school	234	19.7
Grad. high school	354	29.8
Voc/tech/college/cégep	193	16.3
Some university	65	5.5
At school	95	8.0
Grad university	191	16.1
Total	1186	100

Ethnicity	Number	%
British/Irish	488	43.2
French/Fr. Can.	262	23.2
Mediterranean	57	5.1
N. European	174	15.4
E. European	68	6.0
Other	79	7.1
Total	1128	100

Sex	Number	%
Male	600	50
Female	600	50
Total	1200	100

Age	Number	%
18-29	345	29
30-49	534	44.9
50+	311	26.1
Total	1190	100

Community Size	Number	%
1 million+	351	29.2
100,000 - 999,999	320	26.7
10,000 - 99,999	122	10.2
Under 10,000	407	33.9
Total	1200	100

Children in School	Number	%
Children in high school	188	15.8
No children in high school	1000	84.2
Total	1188	100
Children in elem. school	317	26.6
No children in elem. shcool	875	73.4
Total	1192	100

Marital Status	Number	%
Single	276	23
Married	711	59.4
Widow/sep. divorced	131	10.9
Common-law	79	6.6
Total	1197	100

Language	Number	%
English	917	76.4
French	283	23.6
Total	1200	100

Own Or Rent	Number	%
Own	809	67.8
Rent	384	32.2
Total	1193	100

Employed for Pay	Number	%
No	420	35.3
Yes	770	64.7
Total	1190	100

Occupation	Number	%
Prof/exec/own	117	16
Service Sect.	189	25.8
Agriculture/ production	184	25.1
Office worker	143	19.5
Teacher/cult/ technical	94	12.8
Other	17	0.8
Total	733	100